NATION

M'rashtra plans panel to monitor media

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BUSINESS

Sensex rallies 610 points to end above 74K mark

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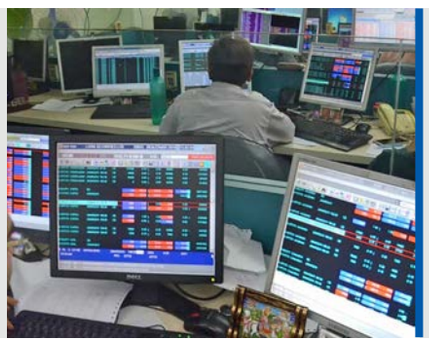

SPORTS

Axar Patel: India's Man Friday in white-ball formats

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CM to present his record 16th Budget today

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will present his record 16th State Budget in the Legislative Assembly on Friday, and it is expected to raise borrowings from both domestic and global agencies to ensure infrastructure development, especially in Bengaluru city. scheme. The size of the 2025-26 budget is expected to reach Rs 4 lakh crore, an increase from the Rs 3.71 lakh crore allocated in the current fiscal year.

—Salar News

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Collegium names Calcutta HC judge for SC

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The Supreme Court recommended appointing Calcutta High Court judge Justice Joymalya Bagchi as a judge of the Supreme Court. The five-member Collegium, headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, noted that no Calcutta High Court judge rose to become the Chief Justice of India since the retirement of Justice Altamas Kabir on 18 July, 2013. The Collegium took into consideration the fact that the Calcutta High Court has only one representation in the Supreme Court bench at present. If the Collegium's recommendation is cleared by the Centre, Justice Bagchi would have a tenure of more than six years at the apex court during which he would also serve as the CJI. If the recommendation is cleared, the Supreme Court would have 33 judges with a sanctioned strength of 34 judges. *—PTI*

Taxpayers declare Rs 29K cr worth foreign assets

NEW DELHI, 6 MAR

More than 30,000 taxpayers have declared foreign assets worth Rs 29,208 crore following Income-tax department's special 'Trust First' campaign that urged them to report income earned overseas accurately, official sources said Thursday. A total of 19,501 taxpayers with "high" foreign account balances or "significant" foreign income from interest or dividends above a specified threshold were contacted. These communications, according to the sources, requested taxpayers to revise their Income Tax Returns (ITRs) to reflect their foreign assets and income correctly. A total of 6,734 taxpayers also "revised" their residential status from resident to non-resident, they said. *—PTI*

India raps UK as Khalistanis target EAM convoy in London

New Delhi serves demarche on British charge d'affaires

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

India on Thursday served a demarche to the British charge d'affaires lodging a strong protest over a breach in security for External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in London as a pro-Khalistani protester attempted to break barricades and tried to stop his motorcade while some others were shouting anti-India slogans.

New Delhi condemned the incident and said it expects the host government to fully live up to their diplomatic obligations. It also deplored the "misuse of democratic freedoms" by the "small group of separatist" elements.

The incident happened as Jaishankar was leaving the Chatham House after concluding an interactive session at the institute, home to Royal Institute of International Affairs, on Wednesday evening.

The External Affairs Minister was in London as in the first leg of his six-day visit to the UK and Ireland from Tuesday that is aimed at exploring ways to further boost bilateral cooperation.

"We have seen the footage of a breach of security during the visit of the external affairs minister to the UK," external affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

A Khalistani protester breaches the security and comes in front of S Jaishankar's convoy ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

The British foreign ministry also condemned the incident and said attempts to disrupt public events were unacceptable.

Videos posted on social media showed a small group of pro-Khalistan protesters holding yellow flags were shouting slogans against India and Jaishankar on the opposite side of the road from Chatham House.

As Jaishankar was about to leave the institute, a tall man was seen attempting to break the police cordon and run towards Jaishankar's motorcade.

The tall and bearded man even tried to block the minister's motorcade by standing in front of it and tore an Indian flag.

The man was swiftly taken away by Metropolitan Police officers.

It was not the first such incident of breach of security by pro-Khalistan elements.

In March, 2023, certain pro-Khalistan elements pulled down the Indian flag at the Indian high commission in London, triggering strong reaction from India.

Earlier, during his session at Chatham House, Jaishankar was asked about human rights concerns pertaining to India.

"A lot of this is political. We have been for political reasons at the receiving end of a lot of expressions and campaigns on human rights. We listen to it. We are not perfect, nobody is perfect. There can be situations which require redressal and remedy," said Jaishankar.

"But I would argue, if one looks around the world, we have a very strong human rights record," he said. *—PTI*

'BASELESS REMARKS'

Pak fumes after EAM calls PoK as 'stolen part'

LONDON/ISLAMABAD, 6 MARCH

The Kashmir dispute would be solved after the "return of the stolen part of Kashmir which is under illegal Pakistani occupation," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said.

Jaishankar was speaking at a session at the Chatham House think tank in London on Wednesday, prompting Pakistan on Thursday to reject as 'baseless' his remarks regarding Kashmir, while making counter demands to address the issue.

Responding to an audience question on 'solving' issues in Kashmir, Jaishankar stated, "On Kashmir, actually we have done, I think, a good job solving most of it."

"Removing Article 370 was step number one, restoring growth and economic activity and social justice in Kashmir was step number two, and holding elections with a very high turnout was step number three.

"I think the part we are waiting for is the return of the stolen part of Kashmir which is under illegal Pakistani occupation; when that is done, I assure you Kashmir will be solved," Jaishankar said.

In Islamabad, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan rejected Jaishankar's remarks.

"Instead of making baseless claims about Azad Jammu and Kashmir, India should vacate the large territories of Jammu and Kashmir under its occupation from the last 77 years," he said. *—PTI*

EAM S Jaishankar during a conversation with Director and CEO of Bronwen Maddox at Chatham House in England ***PHOTO: PTI***

B'luru Palace Grounds Bill passed amid Oppn protest

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

The Karnataka Assembly on Thursday passed the Bangalore Palace (Utilisation and Regulation of Land) Bill, reaffirming state ownership over 472 acres and 16 guntas of land here to facilitate expansion of Ballari and Jayamahala road, amid protests by the opposition BJP.

During the discussion, Karnataka Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister HK Patil said the state government would have to provide Rs 200 crore worth of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) for each acre of land, which means that for 15 acres, Rs 3,000 crore worth of TDR would be issued.

"If we accept it, then this 2-km stretch of road will become the costliest road in the world" said Patil.

He also pointed out that this question was raised not only under the Congress government but also during the previous BJP regime.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

However, the BJP-led cabinet has opposed the project with BJP state president BY Vijayendra and BJP MLA Arvind Bellad alleging that the government was targetting Yaduveer Krishna Datta Chamaraja Wadiyar, the scion of the Mysuru royal family, and the BJP MP from Mysuru-Kodagu constituency out of political vendetta.

Intervening, Minister Priyank Kharge said Vijayendra should not have raised it because the intention behind building the road was noble. According to him, the BJP too had the same plan when it was in power.

He sought to know whether thousands of crores of rupees be spent on a road which should have cost significantly less. Speaker UT Khader then called for a voice vote and the bill was passed by the Assembly amidst opposition BJP's discontent. *—PTI*

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42% QUOTA FOR BCs?

T'gana clears SC Sub-Categorisation Bill

HYDERABAD, 6 MARCH

The Telangana Cabinet approved the Scheduled Caste (SC) sub-categorisation proposal on Thursday.

The decision comes ahead of the 2025 Budget Session, where the state government is expected to table the bill for legislative approval.

The Cabinet also discussed on the proposed 42 per cent reservation for Backward Classes (BCs) and addressed water-sharing issues with Andhra Pradesh, particularly concerning the Banakacherla project.

In February, during a special Assembly session, the Congress-led government unveiled the findings of the long-awaited caste census, fulfilling a key promise from its 2023 Assembly election campaign.

The Shameem Akhtar Commission report, which recommended sub-categorisation within SC communities based on intra-backwardness, was also released during the Cabinet meeting.

The report recommended creating three sub-groups within SC reservations to ensure a more equitable distribution of benefits. The report also proposed the introduction of a creamy layer criterion to exclude economically well-off individuals; however, the Congress government has decided against implementing this measure. To further refine the proposed legislation, the state government has extended the tenure of the Shameem Akhtar Commission until 10 March. Another key promise from the 2023 Assembly election campaign was increasing BC reservations to 42 percent. Following the caste census, the Telangana government reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the policy. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: ANI

UP man kills, chops child for visiting neighbour

SITAPUR, 6 MARCH

A man has been arrested in Sitapur district, Uttar Pradesh, after allegedly murdering his five-year-old daughter, Tani, whom he reported missing last month. Mohit Mishra, 40, filed a complaint at Rampur Mathura police station on 25 February 25. The following day, authorities discovered a severed leg and other body parts in a mustard field, leading to an investigation that confirmed the remains belonged to Tani. Investigators revealed that Mishra had strangled his daughter and disposed of her body nearby, which was later mauled by wild animals. During questioning, he admitted to the crime, explaining he was angered by Tani's defiance of his warning not to visit a neighbour's house. After abandoning his phone, he hid following the post-mortem & gave evasive responses about her. *—PTI*

CLAIMS REPORT

'Work-life imbalance holds back women from leadership roles'

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

A new report reveals that while a significant number of women aspire to leadership roles, concerns regarding work-life balance are hindering their pursuit. According to Naukri's "The Unfiltered Truth: What Women Professionals Really Want," over 66% of women feel encouraged to seek leadership positions, challenging previous assumptions about professional ambition. However, 44 per cent ultimately refrain, citing worries about balancing work and personal life.

The report, based on responses from 70,000 women across 50 cities, identifies additional barriers women face in seeking

leadership, including unclear or biased promotion processes (35 per cent), limited access to leadership programmes (14 per cent), and a lack of visible role models (7 per cent). Furthermore, the report highlights that 34 per cent of women professionals rank menstrual leave as their top workplace policy request, eclipsing traditional discussions on equal pay. Nearly half of early-career professionals deem menstrual leave non-negotiable, yet 75 per cent report that their workplaces do not support such initiatives. As women progress in their careers, perceptions of pay disparity become more pronounced. While only 11 per cent of women earning Rs 2-5 lakh per annum perceive a gender pay gap, this figure rises to 26 per cent among those earning between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 1 crore.

The widest gaps are reported in Mumbai (28 per cent), Bengaluru (27 per cent), and Delhi (24 per cent). *—PTI*

Days after execution, 2 Indians buried in UAE

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Two Indian nationals -- Shahjadi Khan and Muhammed Rinash Arangilottu -- were buried in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in presence of their family members.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Shahjadi and Arangilottu were buried following regulations of the UAE. Thirty-year-old Shahjadi a caregiver from Uttar Pradesh's Banda district was executed last month, months after a court found her guilty of allegedly murdering a four-month-old toddler. Rinash, who hailed from Kannur in Kerala, was handed death sentence for allegedly killing a UAE national and was executed a few weeks ago. *—PTI*

3 language issue reaches SC amid NEP debate

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

In the ongoing debate on the alleged 'imposition of languages' in the Southern States, a PIL was filed in the Supreme Court seeking implementing of the three-language formula, proposed by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal.

The plea filed by BJP lawyer GS Mani said the refusal or failure of the State government to implement the National Educational Policy of the Central government or sign an MoU may harm the public interest or infringe on citizens' rights. "Free education is a fundamental right given by the Constitution. By refusing to accept this plan, the state government is denying the fundamental right of free education to the school children con-

PHOTO: PTI

cerne," added the PIL.

Petition states that the National Education Policy is a major education policy plan brought by the Central government with the aim of improving the quality of school education for students from all walks of life but the state governments of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal are refusing to accept the three-language formula for political reasons. *—PTI*

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CESC earns ₹5.94 cr in electricity theft fines

MYSURU, 6 MARCH

The Chamundeshwari Electricity Supply Corporation (CESC) Vigilance Committee has intensified its crackdown on electricity theft, recovering penalties totalling Rs 5.94 crores during a recent drive for the fiscal year 2024-25. CESC executive engineer C Umesh and Deputy Superintendent of Police Anandamurthy reported that raids were conducted at 5,716 locations across Mandya, Mysuru, Kodagu, Hassan, and Chamarajanagar. The initiative led to 1,312 cases of illegal power connections being filed, with penalties amounting to Rs 6.36 crores. Umesh emphasised that drawing illegal power is a serious offence under the Electricity Act, urging the public to report any suspicious activity, assuring that identity of informants would remain confidential *—Salar News*

Cop accused of harassment as man dies by suicide

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

A 42-year-old man was found hanging at his residence in Srinivas Nagar, Kamakshipalya, late Wednesday night. His wife alleged that continued harassment and intimidation by officers of Rajagopala Nagar police station prompted him to take the extreme step. The deceased has been identified as Mahadevaiah. According to preliminary investigations, he had been embroiled in a property dispute with a relative, identified as Shivashankar, who had lodged a complaint against him at Rajagopala Nagar police station. Though Mahadevaiah had secured bail in the case, he was repeatedly summoned for questioning by the police. In a complaint filed with Kamakshipalya police, Mahadevaiah's wife accused a police inspector from Rajagopala Nagar police station of subjecting her husband to continuous mental torture under the guise of investigation. On Wednesday also, Mahadevaiah was reportedly called to the police station for questioning. Hours later, he was found hanging at his home *—Salar News*

Biz man dies by suicide after financial losses

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

A 32-year-old businessman reportedly jumped to death from the 12th floor of his apartment under Parappana Agrahara police station limits after he suffered heavy financial losses in his business startup. The deceased, Mayank Rajani, was a native of Uttar Pradesh and a resident of SNN Apartments on Haraluru-Kudlu Road. The incident occurred around 5am on 4 March. Police said Mayank launched a startup two years ago. Although the company showed early promise, it eventually began incurring losses. Mayank met a woman from West Bengal, who later joined his firm. The two soon started living together. Police stated that Mayank had confided in her about his financial distress. *Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support. —Salar News*

Guarantees may get bigger share in Budget

However, experts flag concern over spending

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

As Chief Minister Siddaramaiah presents his 16th budget on Friday, he faces the challenge of balancing development with social welfare initiatives. While borrowing remains inevitable to fund cash-strapped guarantee schemes, prioritising infrastructure development is equally crucial for the state's growth.

With the 2025-2026 budget expected to exceed Rs 4 lakh crore, up from Rs 3.71 lakh crore in 2024–25, allocations for the five guarantee schemes are also likely to surpass Rs 52,000 crore due to an anticipated rise in beneficiaries.

This raises a critical question – how will the budget impact these guarantee schemes?

Speaking to **Salar News**,G Shreekumar Menon, IRS officer and Director General of the National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes & Narcotics (NACIN), said, "While social welfare allocations are essential, a continuous increase without a corresponding rise in revenue could strain day-to-day governance."

Menon said although freebie schemes have helped boost household incomes, they come at a significant cost to the state exchequer.

Raghavendra Poojari HS, programme lead at Bangalore Political Action Committee (B.PAC), said: 'The government's financial commitment to welfare schemes has been significant. In 2024–25 budget, Rs 53,674 crore (15.49% of the budget) was allocated for this. These schemes have benefited 1.5 crore Gruha Jyoti recipients, 1.15 crore BPL families under Anna Bhagya, millions of women using Shakti Yojana for free bus travel, and nearly two lakh unemployed youth under Yuva Nidhi.

However, misuse of benefits through fake BPL cards is draining state finances. *—Salar News*

Budget must support Brand B'luru: Experts

City's crumbling infra cries for attention

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Bengaluru, once India's proud 'Silicon Valley,' is now buckling under the weight of its own growth.

Traffic gridlocks, crumbling roads, relentless flooding and failing public transport system have overshadowed its tech-driven success. The Brand Bengaluru initiative, led by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, aimed to cement the city's global stature, but poor planning and governance have dulled its sheen.

As Chief Minister Siddaramaiah prepares to unveil the budget on 7 March, the question looms – will it be another branding exercise or a real blueprint for fixing Bengaluru's broken infrastructure?

Civic activist Srinivas Alavalli emphasised on the need to address Bengaluru's widening infrastructure gaps. "I am eager to see considerable funding directed towards enhancing public transport, especially for the BMTC, which is essential for the city's mobility," he said. Shivakumar's push for vanity projects such as tunnel roads and sky decks contradicts with the government's stated goal of increasing public transport usage from 30 per cent to 70 per cent. "I also hope to see improvement in social infrastructure, particularly anganwadis and primary health centres. It is also crucial to revive the State Finance Commission to ensure that all cities, including Bengaluru, receive their fair share of tax revenues based on a clear formula," he said. Ashish Verma, professor and convenor of the IISc Sustainable Transpor tation Lab, said, "Brand Bengaluru should prioritise making it a sustainable city. The government must ensure affordable fares by supporting BMRCL, BMTC and K-RIDE while expediting MRTS expansion, adding more buses and implementing bus lanes." *—Salar News*

TEJASVI TIES THE KNOT

Bengaluru South MP and Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha National President Tejasvi Surya on Thursday tied the knot with Carnatic classical singer Sivasri Skandaprasad in the city. Earlier this year, reports suggested that Surya would marry Skandaprasad, a bioengineering graduate with a master's degree from Chennai Sanskrit College. She is also a Bharatanatyam dancer. **PHOTO: SALAR**

Govt tables Microfinance Bill in Assembly

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

The Karnataka government on Thursday introduced a bill in the Assembly aimed at protecting borrowers from harassment by microfinance institutions (MFIs), with penal provisions including a jail term up to 10 years and fines of Rs five lakh for violations.

The Karnataka Micro Loan and Small Loan (Prevention of Coercive Actions) Bill, 2025, was tabled by Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister H K Patil on behalf of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and will replace the Karnataka Micro Loan and Small Loan (Prevention of Coercive Actions) Ordinance that was promulgated on 12 February, in response to a spate of suicides and multiple complaints from various parts of the state against predatory loan recovery methods by microfinance firms. According to the bill, all microfinance institutions, money-lending agencies and lenders have to register with deputy commissioners within 30 days. The bill prohibits 'coercive' loan recovery methods, and action can be taken by authorities against microfinance companies or lenders if they use pressure, violence, insults, private/outsourced agencies, persons with a criminal background.

It proposes for the government appointment of an ombudsman to act as a mediator between the borrower or lender to settle loan disputes, and it also provides police officers not below the rank of Deputy Superintendents of Police powers to file cases suo-motu. *—PTI*

Committed to protect local language: DKS

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has reiterated the Congress party's commitment to safeguarding local languages amidst rising tensions over the Centre's three-language policy, particularly in the context of the new National Education Policy (NEP). He stated that the party would adhere to decisions made by the High Command. This comes as Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin invoked the spirit of the 1967 Tamil language protests, urging his state to resist the "imposition of Hindi". Stalin's parallel between past struggles and current challenges highlights Tamil Nadu's strong opposition to the NEP.

Minister Sharan Prakash Patil expressed apprehensions regarding the proposed delimitation process, claiming that the BJP government is "not comfortable with southern states" due to their limited numbers in the region. Following an all-party meeting convened by Stalin, Patil stressed that any delimitation must protect the number of parliamentary seats allocated to southern states, which could otherwise face reduced representation.

The meeting concluded with a resolution opposing delimitation based on population change. *—Agencies*

R Ashoka

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

CMO worker wrote Oxford blog praising State: BJP

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Leader of opposition in Karnataka Assembly R Ashoka said on Thursday that an Oxford university blog praising Karnataka model of development was actually written by a person who was working in Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's office.

Governor Thaa warchand Gehlot, in his customary address to the Assembly on Monday, said Karnataka model of development is being studied by many economists and universities around the world. "Oxford University has described the model as 'Shining a Light in the Darkness' and a 'Blue Print for the World' in its Human Rights Hub blog." Referring to this speech, Ashoka accused the government of making the Governor speak a "bundle of lies" in his customary address to the joint sitting of the state legislature. *—PTI*

Lokayukta raids unearth ₹36 cr assets of 8 govt officers

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

The Lokayukta sleuths on Thursday raided places linked to eight government officials, who are accused of amassing assets disproportionate to their known sources of income, in various parts of the state.

The raid unearthed assets worth Rs 36.53 crore, including immovable properties worth Rs 26.47 crore, jewels worth Rs 3.73 crore and vehicles worth Rs 3.08 crore.

According to the Lokayukta sources, the searches were carried out at 40 locations belonging to the accused officers posted in Bengaluru, Kolar, Tumakuru, Kalaburagi, Vijayapura, Davangere and Bagalkot districts.

The officers who were raided include TD Nanjundappa, Chief Engineer -Group A in the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms in Bengaluru; HB Kalleshappa, Executive Engineer Grade-1, Quality Control and Quality Assurance, Highway Engineering in Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike; G Nagaraj, Assistsnt Executive Engineer in in Kolar; Jagannath, Project Implementation Unit in Kalaburagi; JS Nagaraju, Dist Statistical Officer, Food Safety and quality Unit, Health Department, Davangere.

Nanjundappa was found to have assets to the tune of Rs 8.46 crore, which comprised nine sites (plots), houses and agriculture land valued at Rs 7.47 crore. Kalleshappa had properties worth Rs 6.5 crore including two sites, three houses and agriculture land whose estimated cost was Rs 4.97 crore.

Nagaraj had assets worth Rs 2.19 crore, Jagannath owned properties worth Rs 4.55 crore, Nagaraj J S – Rs 6.14 crore, Jagadeesh – Rs 3.11 crore, Durgad – Rs 1.92 crore and Kembavi owned assets worth Rs 3.64 crore. *—Salar News*

PROTEST FOR JOBS

Members of the All Karnataka State Students' Association protested at Freedom Park on Thursday, demanding the state government issue the complete 2017 KPCL appointment order letter for the Chemist and Chemical Supervisor vacancies. The protesters also called for the resolution of any visible issues in the ongoing recruitment process. They voiced concerns over delays and lack of clarity regarding the appointment procedures, urging the government to address the grievances of students seeking employment **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BRIMS supervisor accused of harassing staff for a year

BIDAR, 6 MARCH

A non-clinical supervisor at BRIMS Hospital is facing serious allegations of sexual harassment following a complaint lodged by female staff members with the Chairperson of the Women's Commission, Dr. Nagalakshmi Chaudhary.

During her visit to BRIMS, Lakshmi, a Group 'D' employee with over ten years of service, approached Dr. Chaudhary in distress, pleading for justice. "Give me justice, or I will end my life right here," she cried, revealing that she has been harassed by supervisor Prakash Malge for the past year. Lakshmi alleged that Malge has threatened her, demanding she comply with his demands or face repercussions, and has even been marking her attendance as absent.

Despite her efforts to seek assistance from local law enforcement and hospital authorities, including the District Superintendent of Police and the BRIMS director, she reports no action has been taken against Malge.

Dr. Chaudhary consoled Lakshmi, assuring her that an investigation would be initiated and proper steps taken. "Stay strong," she encouraged. Later, she addressed the media, committing to gather detailed information and direct appropriate actions by relevant authorities. Dr. Chaudhary also noted that while cleanliness improvements have been made at BRIMS since her last visit, issues such as the theft of solar panels remain a concern. She inspected various areas within the hospital accompanied by local officials. *—Salar News*

PROTEST AT FREEDOM PARK

Pvt transport unions threaten strike, demand ban on bike taxis

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

Hundreds of drivers in the private transport sector, including members of the Auto Rickshaw Drivers' Union (ARDU), gathered at Freedom Park on Thursday, warning of an indefinite strike if the state government failed to fulfil their long-pending demands.

The protest, led by the Federation of Karnataka State Private Transport Associations and supported by the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), highlighted rising frustration over the government's inaction on key issues impacting private transport workers.

Their main demand is a blanket ban on bike taxis, which unions allege are affecting their livelihoods. Other demands include slashing road tax for private buses and a 'one city, one fare' policy to regulate pricing across transport modes.

A member of the ARDU said, "Operational expenses and the prices of new auto-rickshaws have skyrocketed. The fares have not been revised since 2021," he said.

The current fare per kilometre is Rs 15, and ARDU's demand is to increase it to Rs 20.

Federation President S Nataraj Sharma reminded the government of the Bengaluru bandh on 11 September, 2023, raising 30 demands. Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy resolved 24 of them, but four crucial demands remain unaddressed, he said.

ARDU President M Manjunath announced plans for a night-long protest, pushing for a Rs 500-crore welfare fund for Road Transport Corporation (RTC) drivers *—Salar News*

Court reserves verdict on Ranya Rao's bail

BENGALURU, 6 MARCH

The Bengaluru Economic Offences Court has reserved its verdict on Kannada actress Ranya Rao's bail plea after her arrest by customs officials at Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) for gold smuggling.

The court will announce its decision on Friday, as the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) seeks her custody for further investigation. Rao was intercepted at the airport on Monday, with customs officials seizing 14.8 kg of gold worth approximately Rs 12.56 crore concealed in her luggage. DRI officials suspect her involvement in an international smuggling syndicate, citing her 30 trips to Dubai over the past year.

A search of her Lavelle Road residence led to the recovery of gold jewellery worth Rs 2.06 crore and cash totalling Rs 2.67 crore, bringing the total recoveries to over Rs 17.29 crore. DRI officials argue that Rao's custodial interrogation is crucial to uncovering the larger network, which allegedly includes politicians, businessmen, and police officers.

Rao's legal team opposed further custody, calling it unnecessary. Sources say she broke down during questioning, claiming she was "trapped" into smuggling. Investigators are also questioning her husband, Jatin Hukkeri, who frequently travelled to Dubai. *—Salar News*

BJP-backed candidates win 2 MLC seats in T'gana

HYDERABAD, 6 MARCH

BJP secured two out of three seats in the Telangana Legislative Council elections. Ch Anji Reddy, a BJP-backed candidate, emerged victorious in the Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Karimnagar Graduates' constituency, defeating Congress's Narender Reddy by a margin of over 5,000 votes. Malka Komaraiah, another BJP-backed candidate, won the Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Karimnagar Teachers' constituency. Independent candidate Sripal Reddy Pingili, backed by a teachers' union, secured the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda Teachers' constituency. The BJP's victory is seen as a major boost for the party in Telangana. *—PTI*

AAP should help farmers, not use lathis: CM Saini

CHANDIGARH, 6 MARCH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini asked the AAP government in Punjab to come forward and procure the produce of farmers at minimum support price (MSP) as was being done in his state." In Haryana, we are procuring all crops of farmers at MSP and the state government is taking every such step which empowers farmers," Saini said after farmers were blocked by Punjab police from entering Chandigrah to protest on 5 March. "Even now I want to tell Punjab CM not to use lathis on farmers, but empower them," Saini said. "They should give relief to farmers," Saini added. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had on Tuesday lashed out at several farmer bodies for protesting accusing them of turning Punjab into a "state of dharnas" *—PTI*

JU protests enter fourth day; VC still hospitalised

KOLKATA, 6 MARCH

. Protests erupted for a fourth consecutive day at Jadavpur University, led by the Students' Federation of India (SFI) and other student organisations, demanding action after an alleged assault involving West Bengal education minister Bratya Basu. The protests began following an incident on 1 March, where two students were injured when the minister's car reportedly grazed past them. Demonstrators staged sit-ins and called for the filing of a police FIR against Basu and demanded accountability for another incident involving a university staff member's vehicle. SFI leader Russel Pervez asserted the protests would continue until their demands were met, while the university's acting Vice-Chancellor remains hospitalised after an altercation with protesters. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Shami sinned by not fasting, says Muslim cleric

BAREILLY, 6 MARCH

Maulana Shahabuddin Razvi Barelvi, the national president of the All India Muslim Jamaat, condemned Indian cricketer Mohammed Shami for allegedly not fasting during the Islamic holy month of Ramzan. In a recent video, the cleric stated that Shami was seen drinking during a match against Australia, labelling this act as sinful under Shariat law. Razvi asserted that fasting is an obligatory practice in Islam and that intentionally breaking a fast renders one a sinner according to Islamic teachings. While acknowledging that playing cricket is not inherently wrong, he urged Shami to adhere to his religious duties and act responsibly as a Muslim. Shami is currently in Dubai as a member of the Indian squad competing in the ICC Champions Trophy. *—PTI*

Language parity not chauvinism: Stalin

He says anti nationalists are the Hindi zealots

CHENNAI, 6 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said Hindi zealots believed their entitlement was natural **PHOTO: PTI**

- Stalin claimed that language imposition was a key reason why Bangladesh and Pakistan split, and why the Soviet Union dissolved

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President MK Stalin said demanding linguistic equality is not chauvinism and alleged that the "true chauvinists and anti-nationals are the Hindi zealots". They believe their entitlement is natural but resistance is treason, he added.

Stalin, in a social media post said, "When you are accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression. I am reminded of this famous quote when some entitled bigots brand us chauvinists and anti-nationals for the supposed crime of demanding Tamil's rightful place in Tamil Nadu."

Further, he said: "The very people who glorify Godse's ideology have the audacity to question the patriotism of DMK and its government that contributed the highest amount of funds during the Chinese aggression, Bangladesh liberation war, and Kargil war, while their ideological forefather is the one who assassinated Gandhi."

"Demanding linguistic equality is not chauvinism," he added "Do you want to know what Chauvinism looks like? Chauvinism is naming the three criminal laws that govern 140 crore citizens in a language that Tamils cannot even pronounce or comprehend by reading. Chauvinism is treating the state that contributes the most to the nation as second-class citizens. The true chauvinists and anti-nationals are the Hindi zealots who believe their entitlement is natural but our resistance is treason."

Separately, writing to party workers, he said Pakistan and Bangladesh fragmented over language.

"The language imposition by Pakistan on Bangladesh was the fundamental reason for the new country." Language dominance was a reason for the disintegration of the Soviet Union, he noted. *—PTI*

Marathi language of M'rashtra: Fadnavis

RSS leader says Marathi not needed, sparks row

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

Opposition parties erupted into protest after RSS leader Bhaiyyaji Joshi said Mumbai had multiple languages **PHOTO: PTI**

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis asserted that Marathi is the language of Maharashtra.

Fadnavis was speaking in the state assembly after Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Bhaskar Jadhav said the government should clarify its stand on senior Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader Suresh Bhaiyyaji Joshi's comments that a person coming to Mumbai may not necessarily learn Marathi.

"I haven't heard what Bhaiyyaji said, but the language of Mumbai and Maharashtra is Marathi." "Everyone should learn Marathi and should speak the language," he said.

The CM said his government respects other languages as well. "If you love and respect your own language, you do the same to other languages. I am sure Bhaiyyaji will agree with me," Fadnavis said.

In a clarification, Joshi said his remarks were misconstrued, "It is expected that those coming from outside and speaking other languages should also understand Marathi," Joshi said. "Marathi is my native language and I take pride in it,"

The controversy emerged from Joshi's remarks at Ghatkopar event on Wednesday. "Mumbai doesn't have a single language. Each part of Mumbai has a different language. Ghatkopar area's language is Gujarati. So if you are residing in Mumbai, it is not necessary that you have to learn Marathi," Joshi had said.

Meanwhile, Uddhav Thackeray alleged that Joshi's remarks reflect the hidden agenda of the RSS and the BJP to divide Mumbai.

"Joshi should be booked for treason. I had made a law when I was the CM to make Marathi compulsory in the state. His remarks are against the law," he said.

Thackeray said, "Mumbai is a metropolis. The BJP can't win it by spreading venom."

Leaders of the opposition MVA staged a protest at Hutatma Chowk in south Mumbai against Joshi's remarks. They included Thackeray, Congress leaders Vijay Wadettiwar, Bhai Jagtap, Nitin Raut and NCP (SP) state president Jayant Patil. *—PTI*

SANATAN DHARMA CASE

No fresh FIR against Udhayanidhi: SC

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Udhayanidhi Stalin **PHOTO: ANI**

The Supreme Court on Thursday ordered no fresh FIR should be filed against Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister M Udhayanidhi Stalin without its nod over his contentious 'eradicate Sanatan Dharma' remarks in 2023.

Observing several complaints couldn't be filed on a single issue, a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar also extended an interim order on his exemption from personal appearance in courts hearing the existing FIRs.

The bench was hearing Stalin's plea for clubbing the FIRs and transferring the complaints to one place for future proceedings.

It issued notices to the states where the fresh FIRs were lodged on his plea filed in the pending matter and directed no further cases should be registered without the permission of the Court.

Speaking at a conference in September 2023, Stalin reportedly said Sanatan Dharma was against social justice and equality and should be 'eradicated' and compared it to coronavirus, malaria and dengue, asking it to be 'destroyed'.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Stalin, said the FIRs were registered different places and argued all cases could be transferred to a place where the alleged incident took place - Tamil Nadu citing precedence in apex court decisions in the case of TV anchor Arnab Goswami, Alt News co-founder Mohammad Zubair and politician Nupur Sharma.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for Maharashtra, retorted "Kindly appreciate that if a chief minister of another state says similar things about a particular religion, say Islam, should be eradicated, it wouldn't be tolerated," the law officer said. But the CJI refused to go into the merits of the case and issued the order.

The matter is set to come up on 28 April. *—PTI*

SL warns India to keep fishermen out of its waters

COLOMBO, 6 MARCH

Sri Lanka has urged India to prevent its fishermen from illegally entering the country's waters, citing the significant impact on the livelihoods of people in northern Sri Lanka. Minister of Transport, Highways, Ports and Civil Aviation Bimal Rathnayaka made the request ahead of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's likely visit to Sri Lanka next month.

Rathnayaka expressed his gratitude for India's assistance during Sri Lanka's armed conflict with the LTTE and stressed that helping preserve the livelihoods of northern Sri Lankans would be a significant gesture. "Fishing is the only livelihood for the people in northern Sri Lanka," he said. "If India can help them preserve their livelihoods, it would be the greatest help."

The issue of illegal fishing by Indian fishermen has been a longstanding concern for Sri Lanka. The Sri Lanka Navy has arrested numerous Indian fishermen for poaching in Sri Lankan waters, with over 550 arrests in 2024 and more than 130 this year. Opposition MP Mano Ganesan has suggested that the Sri Lankan government include the issue in its agenda for talks with Modi. *—PTI*

Rana seeks extradition stay, says will be tortured in India

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Tahawwur Rana **PHOTO: ANI**

- Tahawwur Rana said extradition would violate US law and the UN Convention Against Torture, given his alleged connection to the 2008 attacks

Tahawwur Rana, a Canadian national of Pakistani origin and a key accused in the Mumbai terror attacks, has filed an emergency application with the US Supreme Court seeking to halt his extradition to India. Currently detained in Los Angeles, Rana claims he faces a significant risk of torture upon his return due to his Muslim faith and Pakistani heritage.

In his application, Rana, 64, argues that extraditing him to India would violate US law and the UN Convention Against Torture, stating there are substantial grounds for believing he would be in danger. He cites his severe medical conditions—including heart disease, Parkinson's, and stage 3 chronic kidney disease—asserting that extradition to Indian detention facilities could act as a "de facto" death sentence.

Rana's legal team emphasised that as a former member of the Pakistani Army and the allegations connecting him to the 2008 attacks elevate the risk of torture. The application follows the US' approval of his extradition.

Rana's counsel requested further information regarding the US' assurances about his treatment in India, which the government declined to answer. His legal team contends that if the extradition proceeds without a thorough review it could lead to potentially catastrophic consequences for Rana. *—PTI*

Year-round tourism in U'khand will help its economy, says Modi

HARSIL, 6 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a visit at Harsil, in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand **PHOTO: PTI**

In a major push to tourism in Uttarkhand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi a day after the approval of the Kedarnath – Hemkund Sahib ropeway made a strong pitch for round the year tourism in Uttarakhand.

Modi said there should be no off-season in the picturesque hill state and this would strengthen its economy in a big way.

Addressing a rally in Harsil, he said the 12-month tourism vision by the state will provide job opportunities to youth while get the true flavour of Uttarakhand.

"When fog envelops the rest of the country during winter, the state is bathed in sunlight," Modi said as he coined a new term 'Ghaam Tapo Paryatan' (soak the sun tourism) -- in Garhwali language.

He said the state's unique cultural features, cuisine and hot springs can be showcased, calling upon content creators and media influencers to make short films on winter tourism in the state. *—PTI*

'LIFE IMITATES ART'

Odisha govt to paint schools orange, BJD cries saffronisation

BHUBANESHWAR, 6 MARCH

Prasanna Acharya **PHOTO: X**

The BJP government in Odisha has decided to give a 'colourful makeover' ordering to paint all government school buildings with a shade of orange tan-A but the opposition BJD sees red.

BJD has alleged that it is part of the ruling party's attempt at saffronisation of education.

The BJP, on the other hand, asserted that the colour code is hardly controversial as Biju Janata Dal, during its 24-year rule till June 2024, had painted school buildings green and student uniforms were green and white, similar to the party's colour code.

The Odisha State Education Programme Authority (OSEPA) recently passed the order applying to all buildings including PM Shri schools also for adoption of the colour code during construction, repair and renovation works.

Senior BJD leader Prasanna Acharya called it 'sheer politics and condemnable', questioning whether children would be infused with more energy by changing the colour of the building, Acharya alleged that BJP was trying to infuse politics in the minds of the people and nothing positive would be achieved by such a decision which involved crores of state exchequer money.

School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond asserted that the said new colour code would make the schools look attractive and said the previous BJD government too had painted them with their party colour code.

In October last year, the BJP government changed the colour of the school uniforms of students studying in classes 9 and 10 of government and aided school to light brown and clay baked yellow. *—PTI*

Rift rumours on as Abhishek skips key TMC meet

KOLKATA, 6 MARCH

The absence of TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee from Thursday's crucial voter list verification meeting at the party headquarters, reignited speculation within the ruling party. The meeting was the first gathering of the high-powered committee formed by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee last week to address alleged electoral roll irregularities.

Although Abhishek's name was second on the committee's list he did not attend the meeting.

His absence has led to renewed discussions about internal party equations, despite the perception that tensions had eased following Mamata Banerjee's public endorsement.

Sources close to Abhishek cited his preoccupation with the concluding phase of 'Sebashray' camps in his constituency as the reason for his absence. *—PTI*

ED raids in TN linked to TN Minister Senthil

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Senthil Balaji **PHOTO: PTI**

- In a crackdown on corruption and terrorist funding, the ED conducted raids at 12 locations targeting the SDPI and 25 locations across Tamil Nadu targeting the TASMAC

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) launched an extensive investigation into potential money laundering activities involving the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC) and entities linked to Minister Senthil Balaji. The ED conducted searches at around 25 locations across Tamil Nadu.

The raids focused on TASMAC operations, employee premises, and associated distilleries, targeting suspected irregularities in liquor sales transactions and middlemen involvement. Notably, Balaji's personal residence was not among the locations searched. He had been arrested in connection with a 'cash for jobs' scam but is currently out on bail.

In a separate crackdown, the ED targeted the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), conducting raids at 12 locations nationwide due to alleged links with the banned Popular Front of India (PFI). Investigators assert a direct financial and operational connection between the two entities. The SDPI's National President, MK Faizy, was arrested on 3 March.

Both investigations are part of the ED's effort to uncover intricate financial networks related to alleged corruption and terrorist funding in India. *—PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Allahbadia, Apoorva Mukhija appear before NCW

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Social media personalities Ranveer Allahbadia and Apoorva Mukhija appeared before the National Commission for Women (NCW) and expressed regret over the derogatory remarks made on comic Samay Raina's show 'India's Got Latent'. Producers of the show Saurabh Bothra, Tushar Poojari, lawyers of comic Jaspreet Singh and YouTuber Ashish Chanchlani also appeared before the panel, sources said.

The commission took serious note of the vulgar and offensive remarks made by Allahbadia, Makhija, Raina, Singh and Chanchlani and summoned them as well Poojari and Bothra.

Several FIRs were lodged against Allahbadia, known as BeerBiceps, for the comment on parents and sex. However, the Supreme Court has granted Allahbadia interim protection from arrest. *—PTI*

Young elephant tranquillised in Kerala village dies

KANNUR, 6 MARCH

A three-year-old elephant which was tranquillised after it strayed into the residential areas of Ayyankunnu grama panchayat in Kannur district and died later in the evening, officials said. While the exact cause of death is yet to be ascertained, the elephant's weak state and injuries may have resulted in its demise, officials said. The elephant had a serious jaw injury, which appeared to have been caused by a firecracker, for which it could not eat or drink. The chief wildlife warden had directed that the elephant be tranquilised and taken away from the populated area for treatment. It was supposed to be taken to a treatment centre but died before that, they said *—PTI*

Man dies, bridge collapses in U'khand landslide

DEHRADUN, 6 MARCH

A man from Bihar was killed and a bridge connecting Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib and the Valley of Flowers was damaged in a landslide in Uttarakhand, officials said. Joginder Sharma, 34 who was passing by on a motorcycle, died after being hit by the landslide that occurred at 10.00am on the banks of the Alaknanda river damaging the bridge, they said. The damage to the bridge disrupted motor connectivity to at least two villages, stranding dozens of vehicles on the other side of the Alaknanda river. Chamoli District Magistrate Sandeep Tiwari said the Public Works Department has started the construction of a temporary bridge for villagers. The priority is to provide essential commodities and other facilities to the people living in the villages, he said. *—PTI*

Phase 2 trial of Union Carbide waste burning begins

INDORE, 6 MARCH

The second phase of incinerating waste from the Union Carbide factory has commenced at a disposal facility in Pithampur, Madhya Pradesh, with 10 tonnes scheduled for incineration. This initiative is part of a plan to dispose of 337 tonnes of hazardous material from the Bhopal factory, site of the catastrophic 1984 chemical disaster. Following an order from the Madhya Pradesh High Court, incineration will occur in three phases, adhering to strict safety protocols. The first round, which ran from 28 February to 3 March reportedly emitted pollutants within acceptable limits. Local apprehensions regarding environmental safety persist, but state authorities assure the community that proper safeguards are in place for the waste disposal process. *—PTI*

SC raps UP for demolitions in Prayagraj

Action sends shocking and wrong signals, needs to be corrected, says apex court

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Wednesday slammed the Uttar Pradesh government over demolition of houses in Prayagraj without following proper legal procedure and said the action sent a "shocking and wrong signal".

A bench of Justices Abhay Oka and N Kotishwar Singh took exception to "high-handed" case of demolition and said the structures will have to be reconstructed.

"Prima facie, this action sends shocking and wrong signal and this is something that needs to be corrected. You are taking such drastic action of demolishing homes. We know how to deal with such hyper technical arguments. After all there is something known as Article 21 and Right to Shelter," the bench said.

The apex court was hearing a plea by advocate Zulfiqar Haider, professor Ali Ahmed and others whose houses were demolished. The counsel for the petitioners stated that the state government wrongly demolished the houses thinking that land belonged to gangster-politician Atiq Ahmed, who was later killed in 2023 in a police encounter.

Attorney General R Venkataramani defended the state government's actions claiming that reasonable time was given to the petitioners to respond to the demolition notice. He said the matter should be sent to the high court for consideration. *—PTI*

A house being demolished at Prayagraj on the order of the government in Uttar Pradesh **PHOTO: ANI**

SC to look into verdict on ED powers

New Delhi, 6 March

The Supreme Court on Thursday said it would in April decide if its 2022 verdict upholding the Enforcement Directorate's powers to arrest and attach property under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act needs reconsideration.

On 27 July, 2022, the court upheld the ED's powers of arrest and attachment of property involved in money laundering, search and seizure under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). *—PTI*

SC disapproves 'long dates' in matters of liberty

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The Supreme Court said the judiciary was not expected to post court matters concerning liberty with long gap.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih made the observation after being informed that the Punjab and Haryana High Court posted the hearing of a plea for temporary bail on medical grounds after two months.

"In the matters of liberty, the courts are not expected to keep the matter at such a long date," the bench said and permitted the petitioner to move the high court for an earlier hearing.

The bench also asked the high court to advance the date and hear the issue at least with regard to grant of temporary bail.

In another case, a bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan accordingly upheld the dismissal of a public official's anticipatory bail in a corruption case. The court lamented corruption had in it "very dangerous potentialities". *—PTI*

CURBS ON FAKE NEWS

M'rashtra plans panel to monitor media

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

The Maharashtra government is planning to establish a Media Monitoring Centre with a budget allocation of Rs 10 crore to scrutinise news content across print, electronic, and digital platforms.

A government resolution published on Wednesday outlines the centre's mandate to analyse both factual and misleading news reports, preparing comprehensive reports in response.

The Centre will collect and analyse all factual and misleading news reports in print and broadcast media and prepare a factual report.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

If there is a misleading news, it will be clarified in real-time. If there is a negative news, clarification will be given expeditiously, it said.

To ensure effectiveness, a professional consultant will be contracted through an e-tender process to collate government-related news in PDF format.

News coverage will be categorised into positive and negative news, as well as relevant departments, issues, incidents, and individuals.

The consultant will also provide hourly alerts on trends, tones, and moods within the electronic media landscape.

Should the consultant's performance prove satisfactory, the Directorate General of Information and Public Relations (DGIPR) holds the authority to extend the contract to a maximum of two years, with an upper limit of three years as stipulated in the government resolution.

The initiative arises from the increasing volume of publications and digital channels, necessitating centralised oversight of media coverage concerning government policies and schemes. The centre will operate daily from 8am to 10pm under the auspices of the Directorate of Information and Publicity. *—PTI*

'No mangalsutra or bindi?' Pune judge triggers row

PUNE, 6 MARCH

A district court judge in Pune sparked outrage after he questioned a woman's marital status because she wasn't wearing a mangalsutra or bindi.

"I can see that you are not wearing a mangalsutra and bindi," the judge reportedly said. "If you don't behave like a married woman, why would your husband show any interest in you?"

The incident came to light after the woman's lawyer shared a post on LinkedIn detailing the ordeal. The dispute lawyer, Ankur R Jahagirdar said the judge made the remark while while mediating a domestic violence dispute between the woman and her husband.

PHOTO: X

Jahagirdar said such remarks were commonly made by judges. He shared a similar such remark made by a session judge. "If a woman is earning well, she will always look for a husband who earns more than her and will never settle for someone who earns less," he said. *—Agencies*

TARGETED MAHA KUMBH

Babbar Khalsa terrorist with ISI links held in UP

LUCKNOW, 6 MARCH

An Babbar Khalsa International active terrorist with alleged links to Pakistan's ISI was arrested from Kaushambi early Thursday, police said. He had allegedly planned an attack during the Maha Kumbh.

The terrorist, Lajar Masih was nabbed in a joint operation by Uttar Pradesh STF and Punjab police. Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) Prashant Kumar said Masih had planned a major terrorist attack during the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj.

"However, due to intensive security checks, he failed to execute his plan," he said.

The DGP said the arrest of the terrorist also verifies smuggling of arms and drugs from Pakistan into India. He added the UP STF succeeded in recovering some explosives material and illegal arms from the terrorist.

Among the seizures made are three active hand grenades, two active detonators, one foreign-made pistol and 13 cartridges of foreign make, the officer said. Besides, a white coloured explosive powder, an Aadhaar card with a Ghaziabad address, one mobile phone without SIM card.

DGP Prashant Kumar **PHOTO: ANI**

Additional Director General of Police (UP Special Task Force, Law and Order) Amitabh Yash said he had been held before. "This terrorist had escaped judicial custody in Punjab on 24 September, 2024."

"As per available information, the arrested terrorist works for Swarn Singh alias Jeevan Fauji, the head of the Germany-based module of Babbar Khalsa International (BKI) and is in direct touch with Pakistan-based ISI operatives," Yash said. *—PTI*

Show restraint on social media: Bombay HC

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

As street fights are being taken to social media and digital platforms, the Bombay High Court on Thursday opined that not every social media post, comment or speech needed a reaction and there are sophisticated ways to show dissent towards such things.

The Court said while quashing the proceedings and FIR registered against the petitioner, Devendra Patil under provisions of Indian Penal Code and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act on Wednesday.

As per the complaint, the accused had called the complainant and reprimanded him for a social media post against the Brahmin community. The accused allegedly abused the complainant and defamed Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar.

HC's Aurangabad division bench of Justices Vibha Kankanwadi and Sanjay Deshmukh noted that the conversation between the accused and the complainant does not show any disrespect to Dr Ambedkar.

"Rather the caller (accused) asked the informant as to why he was using the name of Dr Ambedkar when he was not following his footsteps. The accused further said that because of people (like the complainant), nowadays the respect for Ambedkar has reduced," they observed.

"People are nowadays sensitive about own caste but show no respect towards others, the Bombay High Court tersely noted calling for restraint to uphold harmony," they said. *—Agencies*

Tunnel collapse: Kerala dogs to join search for workers

NAGARKURNOOL/ T'PURAM, 6 MARCH

As rescue operations at the partially collapsed SLBC tunnel in Telangana continue for the 13th day to extricate eight trapped men, cadaver dogs will be joining the teams in their efforts, officials said on Thursday.

A Kerala government statement in Thiruvananthapuram said the cadaver dogs of the state police will be joining the rescue operations in Telangana's Nagarkurnool.

Cadaver dogs are specially trained to locate missing humans and human bodies. The canines and the officers handling them left for Hyderabad on Thursday morning, it said.

PHOTO: PTI

The dogs were sent for the rescue operation following a request by the State Disaster Management Authority whose help in the matter was sought by the National Disaster Management Authority.

Eight persons have been trapped in the Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) project tunnel in Telangana since 22 February.

Meanwhile, a senior Telangana police official told PTI that two specially trained dogs, brought from Kerala, will be taken inside the tunnel on Thursday. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Railway Board cancels Group-C selections

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The Railway Board has cancelled all pending departmental selections for Group-C posts that were not finalised by 4 March 2025, citing irregularities in the selection process. A circular issued to General Managers across all railway zones stated that due to "several irregularities" observed in recent departmental selections, a review of the selection framework is necessary.

No further selections will be initiated until new orders are issued, and further instructions regarding the selection process are expected to follow.

In a related development earlier on the same day, the Railway Ministry announced that the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) would conduct all departmental promotion examinations through a centralised computer-based test. This move comes in the wake of the CBI arresting 26 railway officials in Uttar Pradesh for allegedly leaking examination papers and seizing Rs 1.17 crore in cash during their raids. *—PTI*

TEMPORARY SHELTER

Domestic violence survivors may get 10-day stay at govt centres

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The Centre is planning to double the duration for which domestic violence survivors can seek temporary shelter at One-Stop Centres from five to 10 days, Women and Child Development Minister Annapurna Devi said.

One Stop Centres (OSC) are intended to support women affected by violence within the family, community and at the workplace. According to the present legislation, women affected by violence along with their children (girls of all ages and boys up to eight years of age) can avail themselves of a temporary shelter at the OSC for a maximum period of 5 days.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Devi said the Women and Child Development Ministry is planning to increase the number of days for which domestic violence survivors can seek temporary shelter at one stop centres from five to 10 days and the government is finalising it.

Devi added that under special circumstances the survivors can stay in such centres for up to 15 days.

For women requiring long-term shelter, OSCs make arrangements with Swadhar Greh which are managed or affiliated with government or NGOs.

Devi was speaking at a dinner that she hosted at her residence to felicitate women panchayat leaders and sarpanch from Jharkhand on Wednesday night. Devi is an MP from Jharkhand's Koderma.

These women are in the national capital to participate in the International Women's Day program celebrating the achievements and leadership of women everywhere. *—PTI*

CAT quashes IRS officer's transfer from Mumbai

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

The Central Administrative Tribunal has set aside the transfer of IRS officer Sameer Wankhede from Mumbai to Chennai, saying the revenue department 'patently violated' its own transfer guidelines.

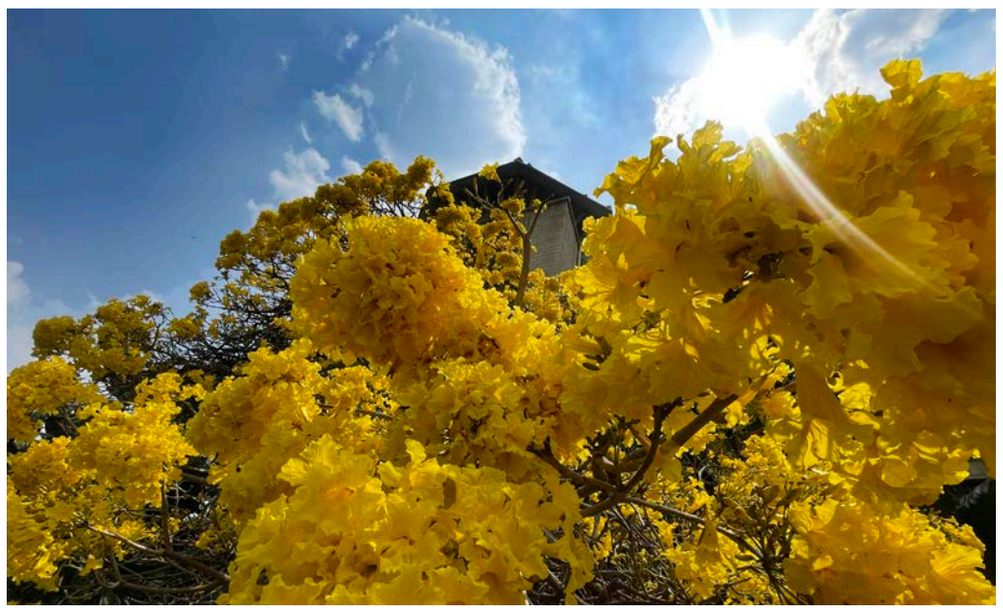
Wankhede, a 2008 batch Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer, made headlines for allegedly demanding Rs 25 crore from Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan's family by threatening to implicate his son Aryan Khan in the Cordelia cruise drug bust case during his tenure in the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Mumbai in 2021. He is currently working as additional commissioner in the Department of Revenue in Chennai following his transfer on 30 May, 2022.

He previously held the zonal director's position in the Mumbai NCB before his transfer.

Wankhede alleged his transfer was punitive in nature and a direct consequence of his actions at the NCB, claiming he and his family members received multiple death threats from the underworld and appealed to the Courts against the transfer.

The principal CAT bench comprising Justice Ranjit More and member Rajinder Kashyap found procedural lapses and potential bias in the transfer decision issued by the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance.

The tribunal said while government officers had an all-India service liability, transfer policies must be implemented in a fair, transparent, and just manner. *—PTI*



BENGALURU TURNS GOLD

Fully bloomed yellow Tabebuia flowers at Vidhana Soudha premises in Bengaluru on Thursday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

UN: Women's rights declined in 1/4 of nations in 2024

Thirty years after world leaders adopted a historic blueprint to achieve gender equality, a new United Nations report says women's and girls' rights are under attack and gender discrimination remains deeply embedded in economies and societies.

The report released on Thursday by the UN agency focused on women's rights and gender equality found that nearly one-quarter of governments worldwide reported a backlash to women's rights last year.

Despite some progress, including on girls' education and access to family planning, UN Women said a woman or girl is killed every 10 minutes by a partner or family member and that cases of conflict-related sexual violence have increased by 50 per cent since 2022. The report, released ahead of International Women's Day on Saturday, also noted that only 87 countries have ever been led by a woman.

"Globally, women's human rights are under attack," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement. "Instead of mainstreaming equal rights, we're seeing the mainstreaming of misogyny."

He said the world must stand firm "in making human rights, equality and empowerment a reality for all women and girls, for everyone, everywhere."

The 189 countries that attended a 1995 Beijing women's conference adopted a landmark declaration and 150-page platform for action to achieve gender equality, calling for bold action in 12 areas, including combating poverty and gender-based violence and putting women at top levels in business, government and at peacemaking tables.

It also said for the first time in a UN document that human rights include the right of women to control and decide "on matters relating to their sexuality, including their sexual and reproductive health, free of discrimination, coercion and violence."

In the new review, which includes contributions from 159 countries, UN Women said countries have taken many steps forward on gender equality and women's rights in the past five years but that such rights still are facing growing threats worldwide.

The report says women have only 64 per cent of the legal rights of men ***PHOTO: X***

On the positive side, the report said some 88 per cent of countries have passed laws to combat violence against women and established services to help victims in the past five years. Most countries have banned workplace discrimination, and 44 per cent are improving the quality of education and training for girls and women, it said.

Yet gender discrimination is deeply embedded, with wide gaps in power and resources that restrain women's rights, the report said.

"The weakening of democratic institutions has gone hand in hand with backlash on gender equality," UN Women said. It warned that "anti-rights actors are actively undermining longstanding consensus on key women's rights issues" and seeking to block or slow legal and policy gains they can't roll back.

UN Women said almost 25 per cent of countries reported that backlash on gender equality is hampering implementation of the Beijing platform.

According to the report, women have only 64 per cent of the legal rights of men, and while the proportion of female lawmakers has more than doubled since 1995, three-quarters of lawmakers are still men. UN Women also said women aged 15 to 24 lag behind other age groups on access to modern family planning; maternal mortality ratios have remained almost unchanged since 2015; and 10% of women and girls live in extremely poor households.

The UN agency said cases of conflict-related sexual violence have increased 50% since 2022 — and women and girls are victims of 95% of these crimes.

UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous said that based on the report's findings, the agency has adopted a roadmap to bring the world closer to the UN goal of achieving gender equality by 2030.

It calls for a digital revolution ensuring equal access to technology for all women and girls; investments in social protections, including universal health care and quality education to lift them out of poverty; and zero violence against girls and women. The roadmap also includes equal decision-making power for women and financing for "gender-responsive humanitarian aid" in conflicts and crises.

—PTI

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Logging off social media induces stress: Study

The typical adult in the UK spends nearly two hours on social media per day. And for younger users, this can easily be up to five hours. The likes of Instagram or TikTok seem to draw us into their ever-changing feeds and it's difficult to tear ourselves away from these platforms.

Now latest study shows that even our body reflects a state of being glued to the screen when we are on social media.

We asked 54 young adults to browse their Instagram on their phone for 15 minutes as they would normally do in their daily life.

However, in our study we had attached electrodes to their chest and fingers that allowed us to record their heart rate and "skin conductance", which is an indicator of sweating.

Psychologists can use these physiological markers to infer subtle mental states and emotions. We also added a control condition where our participants read a news article on their phone, just before they logged onto Instagram.

What we found was that, relative to the news reading condition, scrolling away on Instagram led to a marked slowing of participants' heart rate while, at the same time, increasing their sweating response.

From other research we know that such a pattern of bodily responses shows that someone's attention is fully absorbed by a highly significant or emotional stimulus in their environment – it's a state of simultaneous excitement and deep immersion into something very meaningful to us.

Importantly, from the control condition we knew that it was not just being on the phone or reading that caused this bodily response. So there seems to be something special about social media that can easily engross us.

The most intriguing effect in our study happened when we interrupted participants at the end of their Instagram stint and asked them to go back to reading another news article. Rather than snapping out of the excitement and returning to a calmer state, participants' sweating response increased further, while heart rate also increased rather than slowed down further.

What was going on? What helped us interpret these effects were participants' ratings of their emotions. We collected these before their social media bout and at the time we asked them to log off.

Participants reported being stressed and anxious when they had to disconnect from their feed. They even reported having social media cravings at that moment. So it looked like the physiological response that we observed when participants had to log off reflected another form of arousal – but this time it was more negative and stress-related.

Such bodily and psychological stress responses also occur when people with a substance addiction go through withdrawal during abstinence or after quitting "cold turkey". So were these signs that we observed "withdrawal" from Instagram? The answer to this question is not straightforward. However, our study may give us some clues. After the experiment, we asked all participants to fill in a questionnaire assessing symptoms of "social media addiction".

While this concept is controversial and currently not recognised as a mental health disorder, the questionnaire told us something about how social media use can negatively affect someone's daily life. This can even include their work or school results, or lead to conflict with their partners.

Notably, we did not see any heart rate and sweating differences between participants who scored high or low on these addiction measures. That means, that all our participants showed a pattern of excited immersion during use and stress-related arousal when use was interrupted.

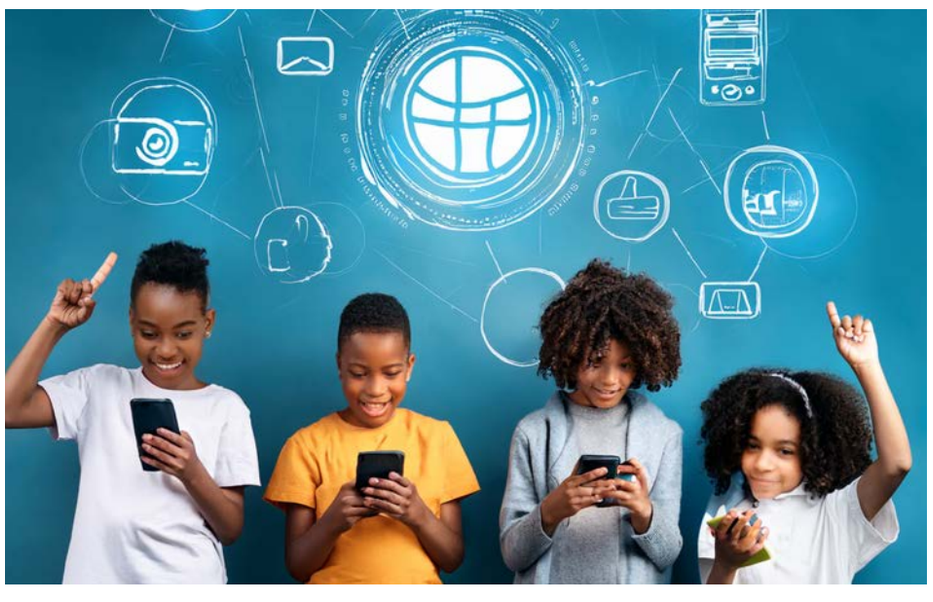
We don't think that this finding means that we are all addicted to social media though. Instead, we believe that social media offers very powerful rewards. And some of its features may indeed have an addictive dimension, such as the personalised short-video streams that trap us in an endless loop of entertaining content.

Critically however, our previous study shows that it is primarily the social aspect of social media that drives most people to use it so intensively. This also means that – in contrast to drugs – social media taps into basic human needs: we all want to belong and to be liked.

So if we recognise the existence of "social media addiction", we might also need to recognise a "friendship addiction". We should therefore exert caution with the term addiction in the context of social media – the risk is that normal behaviour could become "pathologised" and lead to stigma.

And, as our previous research indicates, we may be just fine abstaining or cutting down from social media for a while without experiencing dramatic changes to our wellbeing (either positive or negative). The reason for this is that in contrast to drugs, we can satisfy our needs through other means – for instance, by talking to people.

—PTI



Most of the kids reported being stressed when they had to disconnect from their feed ***PHOTO: AI***

Melting Antarctic ice to weaken strongest ocean current: Report

Following clockwise around Antarctica, the Antarctic Circumpolar Current is the strongest ocean current on the planet. It's five times stronger than the Gulf Stream and more than 100 times stronger than the Amazon River.

It forms part of the global ocean "conveyor belt" connecting the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian oceans. The system regulates Earth's climate and pumps water, heat and nutrients around the globe.

But fresh, cool water from melting Antarctic ice is diluting the salty water of the ocean, potentially disrupting the vital ocean current.

Our new research suggests the Antarctic Circumpolar Current will be 20 per cent slower by 2050 as the world warms, with far-reaching consequences for life on Earth.

A composite image of the globe from space showing the Antarctic Circumpolar Current in green and yellow around Antarctica.

The Antarctic Circumpolar Current keeps Antarctica isolated from the rest of the global ocean, and connects the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans. The Antarctic Circumpolar Current is like a moat around the icy continent.

The current helps to keep warm water at bay, protecting vulnerable ice sheets. It also acts as a barrier to invasive species such as southern bull kelp and any animals hitching a ride on these rafts, spreading them out as they drift towards the continent. It also plays a big part in regulating Earth's climate.

Unlike better known ocean currents – such as the Gulf Stream along the United States East Coast, the Kuroshio Current near Japan, and the Agulhas Current off the coast of South Africa – the Antarctic Circumpolar Current is not as well understood. This is partly due to its remote location, which makes obtaining direct measurements especially difficult.

Ocean currents respond to changes in temperature, salt levels, wind patterns and sea-ice extent. So the global ocean conveyor belt is vulnerable to climate change on multiple fronts.

Previous research suggested one vital part of this conveyor belt could be headed for a catastrophic collapse.

Theoretically, warming water around Antarctica should speed up the current. This is because density changes and winds around Antarctica dictate the strength of the current. Warm water is less dense (or heavy) and this should be enough to speed up the current. But observations to date indicate the strength of the current has remained relatively stable over recent decades. This stability persists despite melting of surrounding ice, a phenomenon that had not been fully explored in scientific discussions in the past.

Weakening of the current could reduce biodiversity and decrease the productivity of fisheries that many coastal communities rely on ***PHOTO: AI***

Advances in ocean modelling allow a more thorough investigation of the potential future changes. We used Australia's fastest supercomputer and climate simulator in Canberra to study the Antarctic Circumpolar Current. The underlying model, ACCESS-OM2-01, has been developed by Australian researchers from various universities as part of the Consortium for Ocean-Sea Ice Modelling in Australia.

The model captures features others often miss, such as eddies. So it's a far more accurate way to assess how the current's strength and behaviour will change as the world warms. It picks up the intricate interactions between ice melting and ocean circulation.

In this future projection, cold, fresh melt water from Antarctica migrates north, filling the deep ocean as it goes. This causes major changes to the density structure of the ocean. It counteracts the influence of ocean warming, leading to an overall slowdown in the current of as much as 20 per cent by 2050. The consequences of a weaker Antarctic Circumpolar Current are profound and far-reaching.

As the main current that circulates nutrient-rich waters around Antarctica, it plays a crucial role in the Antarctic ecosystem.

Weakening of the current could reduce biodiversity and decrease the productivity of fisheries that many coastal communities rely on. It could also aid the entry of invasive species such as southern bull kelp to Antarctica, disrupting local ecosystems and food webs. A weaker current may also allow more warm water to penetrate southwards, exacerbating the melting of Antarctic ice shelves and contributing to global sea-level rise. Faster ice melting could then lead to further weakening of the current, commencing a vicious spiral of current slowdown.

This disruption could extend to global climate patterns, reducing the ocean's ability to regulate climate change by absorbing excess heat and carbon in the atmosphere.

Establishing long-term studies in the Southern Ocean will be crucial for monitoring these changes accurately. With proactive and coordinated international actions, we have a chance to address and potentially avert the effects of climate change on our oceans.

Courtesy, The Conversation

PHOTO: X

HK court overturns convictions of 3 Tiananmen activists

HONG KONG, 6 MARCH

Hong Kong's top court on Thursday overturned the convictions of three former organisers of an annual vigil in remembrance of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown over their refusal to provide information to police, marking a rare victory for the city's pro-democracy activists. Chow Hang-tung, Tang Ngok-kwan and Tsui Hon-kwong, who are core members of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, were convicted in 2023 during Beijing's crackdown on the city's pro-democracy movement. They received a sentence of four and a half months and have already served their terms. The alliance was known for organising candlelight vigils in the city on the anniversary of the Chinese military's crushing of the 1989 pro-democracy protests. *—PTI*

South Korea, US to begin military drills next week

SEOUL, 6 MARCH

South Korean and US troops will begin their large annual joint military drills next week to enhance their readiness against North Korean threats, the South Korean military said Thursday, days after North Korea threatened high-profile provocations against what it called escalating US-led aggression. The South Korean and US forces will take part in the Freedom Shield exercise, a computer-simulated command post training, and related field exercises from Monday to 20 March, said South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff. The statement said the Freedom Shield exercise will involve responses to evolving challenges like North Korea's growing military partnership with Russia. North Korea views major South Korean–US military training as an invasion rehearsal and often responds with missile tests and fiery rhetoric. *—PTI*

Chinese student drugged and raped 10 women

LONDON, 6 MARCH

A London court on Wednesday found a Chinese PhD student guilty of drugging and raping 10 women in England and China. Zhenhao Zou, 28, was convicted of the attacks between 2019 and 2023 following a monthlong trial at the Inner London Crown Court. He was convicted of 11 counts of rape, with two of the offenses relating to one victim. After more than 19 hours of deliberations, jurors concluded Zou raped three of the women in London and seven in China. Police said after the verdict that more than 50 other women may have fallen victim to Zou, which would make him one of the worst sex offenders in UK's history. He also filmed nine of the attacks as "souvenirs". *—PTI*

Over 2.5 cr living with Parkinson's disease: Study

BEIJING, 6 MARCH

More than 2.5 crore people in the world could be living with Parkinson's disease by 2050, largely driven by an ageing population, according to a study. Researchers, including those from the Capital Medical University, China, said the projected numbers are a 112 per cent increase from cases in 2021. Further, cases of the neurological disorder from South Asia are predicted to be the second highest at 68 lakh, following East Asia (over 1 crore), the findings, published in The British Medical Journal, suggested. The researchers said the estimates could "serve as an aid in promoting health research, informing policy decisions and allocating resources". Parkinson's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder.*—PTI*

HAMAS BRUSHES OFF TRUMP'S THREAT

Militant group accuses US President and Bibi of trying to back out of the ceasefire deal

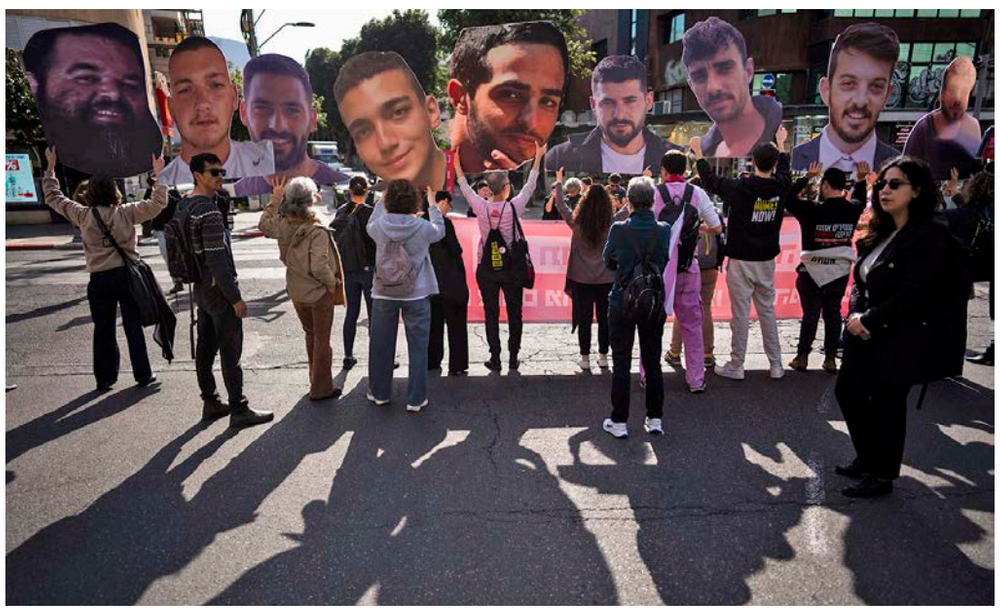
CAIRO, 6 MARCH

The Hamas militant group on Thursday brushed off US President Donald Trump's latest threat and reiterated that it will only free the remaining Israeli hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas accused Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of trying to back out of the ceasefire agreement they reached in January. The agreement calls for negotiations over a second phase in which the hostages would be released in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a permanent ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Hamas spokesman Abdel-Latif al-Qanoua said the "best path to free the remaining Israeli hostages" is through negotiations on that phase, which were supposed to begin in early February. Only limited preparatory talks have been held so far.

On Wednesday, Trump issued what he said was a "last warning" to Hamas after meeting with eight former hostages. The White House confirmed it had held unprecedented direct talks with the militant group, which Israel and Western countries view as a terrorist organisation.



Demonstrators hold photos depicting the faces of Israeli hostages, who are being held in the Gaza Strip, during a protest in Tel Aviv on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

"Release all of the Hostages now, not later, and immediately return all of the dead bodies of the people you murdered, or it is OVER for you," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "Only sick and twisted people keep bodies, and you are sick and twisted!"

Both Israel and Hamas have a longstanding practice of holding onto the remains of their adversaries in order to trade them in hostage-prisoner deals.

Meanwhile, in another incident, Barnard College's library was evacuated Wednesday as police responded to a fake bomb threat during a sit-in staged by pro-Palestinian protesters.

The New York Police Department said on the social platform X that the threat was reported at the upper Manhattan college's Milstein Centre, which serves as the hub for academic life on campus. The department said anyone refusing to leave during the evacuation would be subject to arrest. *—PTI*

TRUDEAU FIRM ON ZERO TARIFF

TORONTO, 6 MARCH

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is unwilling to lift Canada's retaliatory tariffs on the United States if President Donald Trump leaves any US tariffs on Canada, a senior government official told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The official said Trump and Trudeau spoke around midday on Wednesday. "We're not interested in meeting in the middle and having some reduced tariff. Canada wants the tariffs removed," Canadian Finance Minister Dominic LeBlanc told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford, the leader of Canada's most populous province, agreed. "Zero tariffs or nothing. This attack was not started by our country. This was started by President Trump. He decided to declare an economic war against our country and our province, and we're going to hold strong," Ford said.

Trump launched a trade war Tuesday by imposing tariffs against Mexico, Canada and China. *—PTI*

US suspends deportations on military aircraft, says report

The US has halted the use of costly military aircraft to deport migrants who entered the US illegally, The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday. Pentagon officials confirmed no flights were scheduled for the coming days, with the last military deportation flight occurring 1 March. The pause could be extended or made permanent, defence officials told the newspaper. An analysis by the news outlet found that the administration had initially employed military aircraft to demonstrate its tough stance on illegal immigration, conducting approximately 30 flights using C-17 aircraft and about one dozen C-130s to various destinations including India, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, Honduras, Panama and Guantanamo Bay. The flights, however, proved significantly more expensive than standard deportation operations. *—PTI*

Private detention centre in Texas

A private prison company has signed an agreement to reopen an immigrant detention facility in Texas that previously held families with children for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the business said. Nashville-based CoreCivic announced the contract with ICE and the city of Dilley regarding the South Texas Family Residential Center. *—PTI*

Al Green removed from House for disrupting Trump

A heated night on Capitol Hill has triggered a rare disciplinary move against Texas Democrat Al Green after the Congressman was removed from the House chamber for disrupting President Donald Trump during his address to Congress. Republican Representative Daniel Newhouse on Wednesday formally introduced the censure resolution against Green. *—PTI*

Veterans feel 'betrayed'

The mass firing of federal employees since Trump took office in January is pushing out veterans who make up 30 per cent of the nation's federal workforce. The exact number of veterans who have lost their job is unknown, although House Democrats last month estimated that it was potentially in the thousands. *—PTI*

EU begins talks as US support wanes

BRUSSELS, 6 MARCH

Facing the possibility of a fundamental disengagement under US President Donald Trump, European Union leaders opened a day of emergency summit talks on Thursday to beef up their own military defences and make sure that Ukraine will still be properly protected by its allies.

Friedrich Merz, the likely next chancellor of Germany, was conferring with summit host Antonio Costa on how to meet the challenge on a short deadline, only days after he and his prospective coalition partner pushed plans to loosen the nation's rules on running up debt to allow for higher defence spending.

At the same time, the 27-nation bloc was waking up to the news from French President Emmanuel Macron would confer with EU leaders the possibility of using France's nuclear deterrent to protect the continent from Russian threats.

It all underscored the sea change that has happened in the two months since Trump took office and immediately started questioning the cornerstones of cooperation between the United States and Europe which had been the bedrock of Western security since World War II.

Friedrich Merz was conferring with summit host Antonio Costa on Thursday on how to meet the challenge on a short deadline **PHOTO: X**

Meanwhile, France is providing military intelligence to Ukraine after Washington announced it was freezing the sharing of information with Kyiv, French defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu said Thursday.

He added that following the US decision to suspend all military aid to Ukraine, French President Emmanuel Macron asked him to "accelerate the various French aid packages" to make up for the lack of American assistance. *—PTI*

MISSILE KILLS 4 IN ZELENSKYY'S HOMETOWN

KYIV, 6 MARCH

In Ukraine, a Russian ballistic missile killed four people staying at a hotel in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown during the night. Zelenskyy said a humanitarian organisation's volunteers had moved into the hotel in Kryvyi Rih, in central Ukraine, just before the strike, and they included Ukrainian, American and British nationals. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

One of the sites where a South Korean fighter jet dropped a bomb **PHOTO: X**

South Korean jets bomb civilian areas by mistake

SEOUL, 6 MARCH

Two South Korean fighter jets accidentally dropped eight bombs on a civilian area during a joint live-fire exercise with the US military Thursday, injuring eight people, officials said.

The MK-82 bombs released by the KF-16 fighter jets fell outside a firing range, causing civilian damage, the air force said in a statement.

The air force said it will establish a committee to investigate how the accident happened and examine the scale of the civilian damage. It said the fighter jets were taking part in the one-day firing drill with the US military.

An air force official told local reporters that a pilot of one of the KF-16s put in a wrong coordinate for a bombing site. An unidentified Defence Ministry official also told reporters that more investigation was needed to find why the second KF-16 also dropped bombs on a civilian area.

The contents of the officials' briefing were shared with foreign media. The air force apologised and expressed hopes for a speedy recovery of the injured people. *—PTI*

NATURE'S FURY

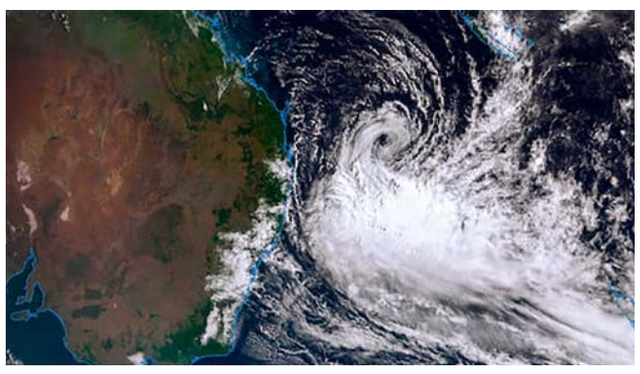
Shut down in Brisbane as cyclone Alfred moves closer to shore

BRISBANE, 6 MARCH

Early wind and rain from a rare tropical cyclone began lashing part of eastern Australia on Thursday as schools were closed, public transport was stopped and desperate residents got around shortages of sandbags by buying potting mix.

Tropical cyclone Alfred is forecast to cross the Queensland state coast somewhere between the Sunshine Coast region and the city of Gold Coast to the south early Saturday, Bureau of Meteorology manager Matt Collopy said.

Between the two tourist strips is the state capital Brisbane, Australia's third-most populous city which will host the 2032 Olympic Games. "The wind impacts, we're already seeing those start to develop on the exposed locations along our coast with gusts reaching 80kph to 90 kph. We are expecting those to continue to develop," said Collopy.



Tropical cyclone Alfred is forecast to make landfall at Queensland coast by early Saturday **PHOTO: X**

Alfred is expected to become the first cyclone to cross the coast near Brisbane since Cyclone Zoe hit Gold Coast in 1974. Cyclones are common in Queensland's tropical north but are rare in the state's temperate and densely populated southeast corner that borders New South Wales state.

More than 4M people live in the cyclone's path.

Alfred was 280km east of Brisbane and moving west on Thursday with sustained winds near the centre of 95 kph and gusting to 130 kph, Collopy said.

The storm is expected to maintain its wind strength before hitting land. But the greatest fears are for the expected flooding over a wide area. *—PTI*

Powerful storms kill three people in US; create blizzard conditions

ATLANTA, 6 MARCH

Powerful storms that killed three people in Mississippi and ripped roofs from buildings in a small Oklahoma town charged eastward on Wednesday, spawning tornado warnings near the East Coast while heavy snow struck the Midwest and dry, windy weather fanned wildfires in Texas.

Meanwhile, forecasters warned that a Pacific storm was expected to bring widespread rain and mountain snow across California and other parts of the West from Wednesday into Friday.

Tornado warnings were issued in the Carolinas, Florida and Virginia on Wednesday. Officials in North Carolina said in a social media post that the US National Weather Service confirmed an EF1 tornado touched down in the Unionville area on Wednesday. The storm caused structural damage, and power outages after wind speeds of up to 145 kph. No injuries were reported, according to the county.

A Pacific storm is expected to bring widespread rain and mountain snow across California and other parts of the West till Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

In Texas, high winds and dry vegetation fueled wildfires in several areas of the state. One burned at least 20 homes and structures in coastal San Patricio County near Corpus Christi, County Judge David Krebs said. There were no immediate reports of injuries. The National Weather Service said critical fire weather conditions were still expected across south central Texas on Wednesday.

Severe weather threats persisted a day after stormy winds forced changes to Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans, which moved up and shortened its two biggest parades. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 6 paise to settle at 87.12 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

The rupee snapped its three-day rally and settled with a loss of 6 paise at 87.12 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid uncertainty over trade tariffs and persistent foreign fund outflows. According to forex traders, investors moved cautiously awaiting the weekly unemployment claims data from the US and the monetary policy announcement by the European Central Bank. While a positive equity market, weakness of the American currency in the overseas market and easing crude oil prices contained the losses for the local unit. In initial trade the local currency gained momentum after the US delayed implementation of higher tariffs on Canada and Mexico, and RBI's decision to infuse Rs 1.9 trillion liquidity into the banking system. *—PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Gold declines Rs 200 to Rs 89,100/10g, silver trades flat

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

Gold price declined by Rs 200 to Rs 89,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a fall in precious metal rates in international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. In the previous market close, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 89,300 per 10 grams. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity depreciated by Rs 200 to Rs 88,700 per 10 grams from Wednesday's closing level of Rs 88,900 per 10 grams. However, silver traded flat at Rs 99,000 per kg. Gold futures for April delivery slipped by Rs 112 to Rs 85,721 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange. On the global front, Comex gold futures went lower by USD 12.20 or 0.42 per cent to USD 2,913.80 per ounce. *—PTI*

AstraZeneca to sell hyperkalaemia drug in India

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

AstraZeneca Pharma India Ltd on Thursday said it has received permission from India's drug regulator to import and sell sodium zirconium cyclosilicate powder for oral suspension used in treatment of hyperkalaemia -- higher than normal potassium levels in the blood -- in adults. The company has received permission from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, Directorate General of Health Services, government of India, to import pharmaceutical formulations of sodium zirconium cyclosilicate powder for oral suspension 5 g and 10 g (Lokelma), AstraZeneca Pharma India said in a regulatory filing. Sodium zirconium cyclosilicate is indicated for the treatment of hyperkalaemia in adult patients. *—PTI*

MapMyCrop raises ₹15.7 cr for agri & tech expansion

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Agri-tech startup MapMyCrop has successfully raised Rs 15.7 crore (£1.8 million) in seed funding, spearheaded by YourNest Venture Capital, with support from angel investors including Eaglewings Ventures. The New York-based company intends to utilise the funds to scale its operations, complete pilot orders, and enhance its sales and technology teams. MapMyCrop leverages satellite imagery and artificial intelligence to provide crop monitoring services, assisting farmers in tracking crops, predicting yields, and optimising supply chains. The firm plans to an AI-driven farm credit score tool and a dedicated forest monitoring system. CEO Swapnil Jadhav expressed the intention to expand into emerging markets in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. *—PTI*

Sensex rallies 610 points to end above 74K mark

Asian Paints, NTPC, Reliance Industries are the gainers

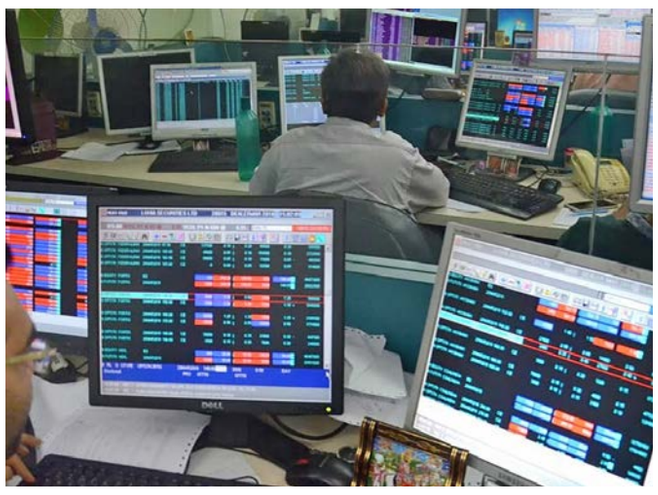
MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

Benchmark stock index Sensex rallied nearly 610 points to reclaim the 74,000 mark while Nifty closed above 22,500 in their second day of gains on Thursday following heavy buying in Reliance Industries on easing crude oil prices.

Recovering from early losses, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 609.86 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 74,340.09. During the day, it surged 660.57 points or 0.89 per cent to hit a high of 74,390.80.

The broader Nifty of NSE advanced 207.40 points or 0.93 per cent to close at 22,544.70. In the session, the 50-share barometer jumped 219.15 points or 0.98 per cent to hit an intraday high of 22,556.45.

From the Sensex pack, Asian Paints, NTPC, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Adani Ports & SEZ, Axis Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Titan and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.



Telecommunication and Realty were the laggards PHOTO: X

Tech Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Zomato, Tata Motors, and IndusInd Bank were the laggards.

"The Indian indices exhibited resilience, owing to positive global cues following Trump's softened tariff stance on automakers from Canada & Mexico amidst the weakening dollar index," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

A correction in crude oil prices, influenced by a slowdown in demand and further economic stimulus from China, ignited optimism in the energy and metals sectors, Nair added.

Broader markets also closed higher with the BSE smallcap gauge climbing 1.63 per cent and midcap index advancing 0.65 per cent. Among the BSE sectoral indices, Energy, metal, Oil & Gas, Commodities, Utilities, Services, Power, healthcare, FMCG and Industrials were the gainers.

Telecommunication and Realty were the laggards.

As many as 3,007 stocks advanced while 989 declined and 107 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul ended higher.

European markets in the mid-session deals were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended in the positive zone on Wednesday. *—PTI*

In February, India imported 1.48 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil from Russia PHOTO: X

India bought ₹1.5L cr worth Russian oil since Ukraine war

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

India, the world's third largest oil consuming and importing nation, spent about Rs 1.5 lakh crore on buying crude oil from Russia since the start of the Ukraine war, a European think tank said on Thursday.

The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) released a report on payments to Russia for fossil fuels since 24 February, 2022.

"According to our estimates, since the beginning of the war, Russia earned EUR 835 billion in revenue from fossil fuel exports," it said.

India, according to CREA, bought fossil fuel worth EUR 205.84 billion from Russia from the beginning of the war until 2 March.

India, which is more than 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its crude oil needs, spent USD 232.7 billion on crude imports in 2022-23 (April 2022 to March 2023) and USD 234.3 billion in 2023-24. In the first 10 months of the current fiscal, it spent USD 195.2 billion.

India, which has traditionally sourced its oil from the Middle East, began importing a large volume of oil from Russia soon after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This is primarily because Russian oil was available at a significant discount to other international benchmarks due to Western sanctions and some European countries shunning purchases.

This led to India's imports of Russian oil seeing a dramatic rise, growing from less than 1 per cent of its total crude oil imports to a staggering 40 per cent in a short period.

Russia, however, continues to be India's top oil source. India imported 1.48 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil from Russia in February, against 1.67 million bpd in the previous month. *—PTI*

JioHotstar to lay off around 1,110 workers post merger

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

JioHotstar will lay off approximately 1,100 employees to cut overlapping roles after its parent company Viacom18's merger with The Walt Disney in November 2024, reported Mint.

The layoffs began in February and will to continue until June 2025, as part of a merger-driven restructuring to eliminate redundant roles.

Those getting fired are from corporate positions in distribution, finance, commercial, and legal departments.

Viacom18 JioCinema and Disney's Star India have merged to form JioHotstar, India's largest media and entertainment company.

JioHotstar, valued at Rs 70,352 crore, is now positioned to compete with major streaming platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, while also bolstering its television business. The company's majority stake is owned by Reliance Industries through Viacom18 and direct ownership, with Disney holding a 36.84 per cent stake.

Employees on notice will receive six to 12 months' salary, depending on how long they have worked at the company PHOTO: X

JioHotstar is reportedly offering a 'generous severance' package to affected employees. Employees on notice will receive six to 12 months' salary, depending on how long they have worked at the company.

For every year completed, employees will get one month's full salary, plus a notice period of one to three months. Nita Ambani is the chairperson of the new company, and Uday Shankar is the vice-chairperson. *—Agencies*

Infineon, CDIL tie up to supply power chips

GANDHINAGAR, 6 MARCH

German semiconductor company Infineon has signed its first agreement in India with CDIL Semiconductors to supply silicon wafer for manufacturing power chips in the country, senior officials of the firm said here on Thursday.

Under the agreement, Infineon will supply bare semiconductor wafers to CDIL, which it will process and use for assembly and packaging to make power chipset for use in products like power inverters, solar technology, automobile power solutions, and renewable energy applications, among others.

"Infineon will provide silicon to CDIL. This is the first of its kind agreement that we have signed in India," Infineon technologies Asia Pacific President and Managing Director CS Chua said.

"By integrating Infineon with CDIL's we are setting new benchmarks in innovation. This collaboration goes beyond growth CDIL President Pankaj Gulati said. *—PTI*

AFTER 90-HR WORKWEEK ROW, L&T ANNOUNCES 1 DAY PAID MENSTRUAL LEAVE

MUMBAI, 6 MARCH

In a first for a major corporate house, engineering, procurement and construction major Larsen and Toubro on Thursday announced a one-day paid menstrual leave for women employees.

The move will benefit about 5,000 women employees at the city-headquartered company.

The company's chairman and managing director S N Subrahmanyan announced the move at a company event to celebrate International Women's Day, sources said.

This is only applicable to the employees of the parent L&T and not for its subsidiaries engaged in financial services or technology, they said. L&T has 60,000 employees, of which 9 per cent or about 5,000 are women, who will benefit from the move, which gets implemented immediately.

The announcement within weeks of the company's top leader facing flak for comments asking employees to put in 90-hours a week and not keep staring at their wives.

The company had later defended the remarks made during an internal virtual meeting as being in line with its nation-building mandate.

Four states - Bihar, Odisha, Sikkim and Kerala - have made provisions for menstrual leaves for their employees. *—PTI*

OLA ELECTRIC FIRST 2W EV MAKER TO GET PLI INCENTIVES

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Ola Electric, the leading electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer in India, has made history by becoming the first two-wheeler EV producer to receive incentives under the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Automotive and Auto Components.

The company has been awarded a total incentive of Rs 73.74 crore for the Determined Sales Value for the financial year 2023-2024, as disclosed in a stock exchange filing. The PLI-Auto Scheme, initiated by the Indian government, aims to enhance domestic manufacturing.

PLI-Auto Scheme boasts a budget of Rs 25,938 crore over five years, with goals to reduce import dependency. Ola Electric, which currently holds a 28 per cent market share in the electric two-wheeler segment, also invested in research and development as well as manufacturing, including its Ola Futurefactory, one of the largest two-wheeler EV production sites in the world. *—PTI*

Automobile retail sales drop 7% in Feb

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

Automobile retail sales across categories, including passenger vehicles and two-wheelers, witnessed a drop of 7 per cent in February amid declining demand, dealers' body Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) said on Thursday.

Overall retail sales in the domestic market stood at 18,99,196 units last month, registering a dip of 7 per cent compared to 20,46,328 units in the year-ago period.

"February witnessed a broad-based downturn across all categories," FADA President CS Vigneshwar said in a statement.

During the month, dealers began expressing concerns about inventory being pushed to them without their consent, he added.

Passenger vehicle retail sales declined 10 per cent year-on-year to 3,03,398 units in February PHOTO: X

"While such initiatives may serve broader business objectives, it is critical to align wholesale allocations with genuine demand to protect dealer viability and ensure healthy inventory management," Vigneshwar stated.

Passenger vehicle retail sales declined 10 per cent year-on-year to 3,03,398 units in February.

"Dealers noted weak market sentiment which specially continues in the entry level category, delayed conversions, challenging targets and stressed that OEMs should avoid overburdening dealers with excessive inventory -- a practice that risks unmanageable stock levels given the cyclical nature of the industry," Vigneshwar said.

Inventory levels in this segment remained in the range of 50-52 days, he noted.

Two-wheeler sales witnessed a drop of 6 per cent year-on-year in February at 13,53,280 units as compared to 14,44,674 units sold in February last year.

Dealers attributed this to inventory imbalances, aggressive pricing adjustments, weak consumer sentiment, lower enquiry volumes and limited finance availability. *—PTI*

EXCEEDS USD 100B PER YEAR

'Tech, govt must tackle illegal online gambling'

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

A joint effort by the government and big tech players like Google and Meta is required to dismantle the fast-growing illegal online gaming sector in India, according to the Digital India Foundation.

The think tank, in a report revealed that illegal operators sustain their operations through a highly sophisticated network of enablers of digital advertising and marketing channels, payment ecosystem, and software providers.

"This illegal sector exceeds USD 100 billion per year and is growing fast at a rate of 30 per cent per year, driven by increasing digital adoption, technological advancements, and regulatory uncertainty.

"Indian regulators need to actively collaborate with social media companies such as Google and Meta as enforcement of controlling gambling-related promotions remains highly inconsistent," the report titled 'Illegal Gambling and Betting Market in India: The Scale and Enablers' said.

Arvind Gupta, Founder of Digital India Foundation, said this has led to a rise in money laundering and illegal payments. Companies like Google and Meta profit from advertising and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), which may explain why they often fail to take decisive action against illegal betting and gambling firms, he said.

As per the report, the scale of illegal gambling and betting in India is immense, with over 1.6 billion visits recorded across four platforms--Parimatch, Stake, 1xBet, and Battery Bet--between October and December 2024.

The scale of illegal gambling saw over 1.6 billion visits recorded across four platforms--Parimatch, Stake, 1xBet, and Battery Bet PHOTO: X

The analysis indicated that social media contributed significantly to this traffic, generating 42.8 million visits during the period.

This traffic was largely driven by direct paid advertisements on platforms like Facebook, as well as promoted content, influencer marketing, and social media engagement campaigns. *—PTI*

SEBI warns against illegal buying from Sunshine Grp

NEW DELHI, 6 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Markets regulator SEBI has cautioned the public against buying and dealing with any property belonging to Sunshine Global Agro and its directors.

The cautionary statement comes after SEBI discovered that some individuals or entities are illegally purchasing, encroaching/trespassing the properties of the company.

SEBI, in a notice issued last week, cautioned public against "buying/dealing with any properties wherein the company, and its directors have any interest/rights directly or indirectly." SEBI also said that no person is allowed to take illegal possession or trespass with the assets of the company and its directors. Any such unauthorised actions will result in legal consequences under applicable laws. SEBI, in July 2014, prohibited Sunshine Global Agro (formerly known as Sunshine Forestry Private Limited) and its directors from collecting funds from investors as well as from launching any new scheme after finding that the company was mobilising funds under its schemes "sale of Jhatropha Bush Group and sale of plant/trees". This plan was in the nature of an unauthorised 'Collective Investment Scheme'.

In February 2019, SEBI had directed the firm and its director not to dispose of or sell any of the assets of the company, except for the purpose of making refunds to investors. *—PTI*

Sports minister to hold two-day 'Chintan Shivir'

HYDERABAD, 6 MAR

Union sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya will chair a two-day meeting with his state-level counterparts, senior administrators, and key government officials here to "exchange ideas and craft a roadmap" for India's Olympic preparations. The March 7-8 gathering will be held at Kanha Shanti Vanam in the city. India is eyeing a double-digit medal haul at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and is also bidding to host the 2036 Olympics, for which a letter of intent has been sent to the Olympic Committee. "The deliberations will focus on enhancing sports governance, grassroots talent identification, infrastructure development, inclusivity, and fostering collaborations," the sports ministry stated in a press release. Key focus areas of the brainstorming session will be an overview of various government schemes and coordination with states on the subject. *—PTI*

300 women boxers to compete in national c'ship

NEW DELHI, 6 MAR

As many as 300 pugilists will compete for glory at the 8th Elite Women's National Boxing Championship in Greater Noida from 21-27 March. Organized in association with the UP Boxing Association, the tournament returns to the venue that hosted its last edition in 2023. Held under the World Boxing and Boxing Federation of India (BFI) competition guidelines, the championship is open to boxers born between January 1, 1984, and December 31, 2005. Each state unit can field a maximum of 10 boxers, with entries by numbers closing on March 10 and final name confirmation due by 15 March. The action officially begins on March 20 with the arrivals, draw, and technical meeting. The opening rounds will take place from March 21 to 24, followed by the quarterfinals on 25 March and the semifinals on 26 March, leading up to the finals on 27 March.*—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Norrie wastes no time securing Indian Wells victory

PARIS, 6 MAR

Norrie, who won the tournament in 2012, took control early in Indian Wells en route to a 6-0 6-4 victory. The British number two dominated the first set with his service returns, the 21-year-old Italian winning only eight points on his serve. The second set proved tighter as Nardi – who beat Novak Djokovic at Indian Wells in 2024 – got on the board, but he was never able to threaten the Norrie serve. Having shared the first eight games, Norrie snatched his opportunity to break once more and served out to complete victory in 64 minutes. Norrie will face Czech 23rd seed Jiri Lehecka in the second round.*—PTI*

Axar Patel: India's Man Friday in white-ball formats

We know the quality and ability Axar has: Gambhir

DUBAI, 6 MAR

Kane Williamson stood between India and an all-win record in the Champions Trophy group stage, keeping New Zealand's chase of 250 flickering with a polished 81.

Till then batting judiciously, Williamson gave a full-hearted charge against Axar Patel, and the slightly slanted delivery evaded his downcoming bat for KL Rahul to complete the stumping. It was the last ball of Axar's spell that read 10-0-32-1 and stood out for its accuracy and the cunningness to maximise his ability in favourable conditions.

But the effort understandably went unnoticed in the din surrounding fellow spinner Varun Chakravarthy's five-wicket haul.

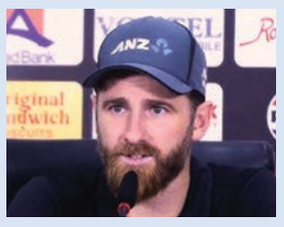
But it is nothing new for Axar, as he once was labelled mercilessly as 'poor man's Jadeja' for the similarity in his skills a left-arm spin bowler and a left-handed batter.

However, it was true that Axar was struggling to break free from the shadow of his illustrious senior teammate. The only way Axar could have cut open a path for himself was to improve his batting skills, and he started making a conscious effort in 2022. An unbeaten 64 against the West Indies in Barbados gave him the necessary confidence in his abilities. It was the breakaway point for him, and Axar admitted it.

"After that match against the West Indies, I knew I could finish games. As soon as I gained that self-belief, I didn't think much about whether I wanted to show batting to anyone or not," he said. But even then, promoting Axar to No. 5 ahead of Rahul, who averages over 50 in that slot with five hundreds, was a massive risk, but a decision the management was confident in. *—PTI*

India has real clarity: Williamson

New Zealand batting mainstay Kane Williamson reckons India have "real clarity" on how they want to operate in Dubai, having played all their Champions Trophy games at the same venue but his team will also be reasonably well-prepared for the tournament finale due to its limited past familiarity with conditions. Williamson did not specifically say that India had an advantage of playing at one venue, choosing to compare it to New Zealand's understanding of conditions in Lahore, where they beat South Africa on Wednesday to set up a final clash against the Rohit Sharma-led side in Dubai on Sunday.New Zealand had played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa.



Aaqib Javed, selectors should take responsibility for Pak's dismal show in CT

-Pakistan's former red-ball head coach, Jason Gillespie

adapting to the conditions will be key to succeed on an "unknown" Dubai surface

-Rachin Ravindra
Dashing New Zealand opener

We are still evolving as a team after another knockout punch

-Rob Walter, head coach

PRAGUE MASTERS

Aravindh Chithambaram during his game with Anish Giri at the Prague Masters chess tournament *PHOTO: X, @PRAGUECHESS*

Aravindh crushes Giri to surge ahead

PRAGUE, 6 MAR

Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram crashed through the defenses of super-solid Anish Giri to jump into sole lead after the end of the seventh round of Prague Masters chess tournament now underway here.

It was Aravindh all the way, while R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with pre-event rating favourite Wei Yi of China. Aravindh took his tally to five points out of a possible seven and now enjoys a half-point lead over Praggnanandhaa, who needs to catch up.

With just two rounds to go, Sam Shankland of the United States defeated Quang Leim Le of Vietnam.

Interestingly, both Quang Leim and Giri had drawn the first six games, and the axe fell on them at the same time.

In the other decisive game 16-year-old Gurel Ediz of Turkey scored over local Nguyen Thai Dai Van to reach a fifty percent score while David Navara of Czech Republic played out a draw with Vincent Keymer of Germany.

Aravindh on five and Pragg on 4.5 are now followed by Wei Yi, Ediz, Keymer, and Shankland on 3.5 points each, and these four are a half point adrift of the trio of Giri, Navara, and Le. Dai Van is alone at the bottom now with 2.5 points in his kitty.

The battle lines are drawn between the two Indians only.

Aravindh is a cool customer in normal positions with a deep eye for tactical complexities and a rare chance against Giri, provided he dismantles the king's side and enters the record books.

There are as many as five Indians in the top 15 live world rankings, and Viswanathan Anand stands at number 15. Aravindh, at 14, entered the top fifteen for the first time.

It was a Queen's gambit declined wherein Giri overestimated his chances and pushed his king side pawns in trying to secure a space advantage. Aravindh came up with a shocker on his 24th turn when he put his knight in front of a pawn, and it was a one-way tide thereon. *—PTI*

Zeel upsets top-seed Ankita in ITF W35

GURUGRAM, 6 MAR

Zeel Desai upset India No. 1 Ankita Raina in a hard-fought three-setter, while Vaidehee Chaudhari too advanced to the quarterfinals of the ITF W35 International Tennis Tournament here on Thursday.

Zeel upset 2018 Asian Games bronze medallist Raina 3-6, 6-3, 6-4, while Vaidehee got the better of compatriot Sahaja Yamalapalli 6-3, 6-4.In doubles, Shrivalli Rashmikaa and Vaidehee moved into the semi-finals, beating the German-Belgium pair of Antonia Schmidt and Clara Vlasselaer 6-3, 6-4. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

VETERAN WICKET-KEEPER

Mushfiqur Rahim retires from ODIs

DHAKA, 6 MAR

Veteran Bangladesh wicket-keeper batter Mushfiqur Rahim has immediately retired from ODI cricket.

The 37-year-old was part of Bangladesh's squad that exited the Champions Trophy from the group stage.

He announced on social media.

"I am announcing my retirement from the ODI format—Alhamdulillah (Thank God) for everything. While our achievements may have been limited on a global level, one thing is certain: whenever I stepped onto the field for my country, I gave more than 100% with dedication and honesty," Rahim wrote on his official Facebook page.

"The last few weeks have been very challenging for me, and I have come to realize that this is my destiny.

"Lastly, I would like to deeply thank my family, friends, and my fans for whom I have played cricket for the last 19 years," he added.

Rahim made his ODI debut almost 20 years ago and ended up representing the country in 274 ODIs, aggregating 7795 runs at an average of 36.42. Only Tamim Iqbal (8357 runs) has scored more ODI runs than him for Bangladesh. He has also played 94 Tests and 102 T20s.

In the team's disappointing Champions Trophy campaign, Rahim failed to score against India before making just two runs against New Zealand.

Rahim has already retired from the shortest format, but in the longest format, he is on course to become the first from his country to play 100 Tests. *—PTI*

RAHIM MADE HIS ODI DEBUT ALMOST 20 YEARS AGO

Representing the country in 274 ODIs, aggregating 7795 runs at an average of 36.42. Only Tamim Iqbal (8357 runs) has scored more ODI runs than him for Bangladesh. He has also played 94 Tests and 102 T20s.

PHOTO: X

TENNIS GREAT 'FIERY' FRED STOLLE DIES, AGED 86

MELBOURNE, 6 JUNE

Fred Stolle, a two-time major winner and member of three Davis Cup-winning teams, has died, Tennis Australia said Thursday. He was 86.

Tennis Australia CEO Craig Tiley described Stolle as an "iconic figure" in tennis as a player and later as a commentator for Australia's Nine Network and U.S. broadcasters. Tiley did not provide a cause of death.

Tiley said Stolle was part of Australia's successful era in the 1960s as tennis progressed from an amateur to a professional sport.

"His legacy is one of excellence, dedication, and a profound love for tennis," Tiley said. "His impact on the sport will be remembered and cherished by all who had the privilege to witness his contributions. "A star member of Australia's Davis Cup team, Fred made significant contributions to the sport following his decorated career, as a coach and astute commentator." Stolle lost the first five Grand Slam singles finals he reached, including four times to fellow Australian Roy Emerson, before beating Tony Roche to win the 1965 French Open. He won the U.S. Open in 1966, beating John Newcombe in the final, and held the No. 1 ranking. *—PTI*

SHUBHANKAR TO LEAD INDIA'S CHALLENGE AT HERO INDIAN OPEN

NEW DELHI, 6 MAR

Two-time winner on the DP World Tour, Shubhankar Sharma and last year's runner-up Veer Ahlawat will lead a strong Indian field in the 2005 edition of the Hero Indian Open golf tournament to be held at the DLF Golf and Country Club, Gurugram from 27 to 30 March.

The other Indians confirmed so far in the 138-player field are Shiv Kapur and Manu Gandas, among others.

Another highlight is Indian teen prodigy Kartik Singh, who has been in form and finished in the top 10 in his last three international amateur events (twice in South Africa and once in Australia).

Amandeep Drall joined Vani Kapoor in a tie at the top after two rounds in the fifth leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Thursday.

On yet another tough scoring day, Amandeep, whose last win on the WPGT came here last year, gave away two late bogeys on the 15th and 16th to shoot 2-over 74 and get to 1-over 145 for 36 holes.

Vani, the first-round leader, added 3-over 75 to be tied with Amandeep at the Classic Golf & Country Club. *—PTI*

Shubhankar *PHOTO: PTI*

No body to select wrestlers: HC

NEW DELHI, 6 MAR

The Delhi High Court on Thursday said the situation couldn't be "unhappier" in the absence of a competent body to select wrestlers for international events.

A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela observed that the world wrestling body, United World Wrestling (UWW), only accepted athletes selected by national bodies recognised by it, such as the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), for international events.

However, it observed neither did the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) restore the ad-hoc committee to run the affairs of the federation nor did the Centre take a decision over the continuing suspension of the federation in terms of the last year's order of a high court single judge.

The court is hearing WFI's appeal against the single judge's order passed on a petition by wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik and her husband Satyawart Kadian.

"On account of the non-restoration of the ad-hoc committee and also on account of the existence of the suspension order as of today, there is no competent body which can be entrusted with the task of selection of team so that participation of wrestlers in international events is ensured. *—PTI*

Football icon Sunil Chhetri comes out of retirement

SYDNEY, 6 MAR

Indian football icon Sunil Chhetri has decided to come out of his international retirement to help the beleaguered national team in the FIFA friendly matches scheduled this month, the sport's apex body in the country said on Thursday."Chhetri is back. The captain, leader, legend will return to the Indian national team for the FIFA International Window in March," the All India Football Federation (AIFF) wrote on its official 'X' handle. The move comes less than a year after he announced his retirement after a glorious career, leaving a huge void that is yet to be filled.*—PTI*

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Liverpool stuns PSG with late winner

LONDON, 6 MAR

Harvey Elliott scored less than a minute after coming on as a late substitute to fire Liverpool to a stunning 1-0 win at Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of the Champions League round of 16.

Runaway Premier League leader Liverpool had survived a barrage of attacks at Parc des Princes to keep the score at 0-0 going into the final stages on Wednesday

Elliott was sent on to replace Mohamed Salah in the 86th minute and became an unlikely hero by sweeping a low shot into the corner of the net with his first touch of the match.

"To go away with a win over here was probably a bit more than we deserved," Liverpool coach Arne Slot admitted after watching goalkeeper Alisson pull off a string of saves in a match dominated by PSG.

Bayern Munich took a big step toward the quarterfinals with a 3-0 win against German champion Bayer Leverkusen, and 10-man Barcelona beat Benfica 1-0.

While the offensive stats heavily favoured PSG, Liverpool's defensive organisation was nothing short of heroic.

Lynch's breakdown noted, "To allow themselves to snatch the win, they had to defend incredibly well, and that's exactly what they did." The Reds' ability to withstand pressure and manage PSG's offensive onslaught was crucial. *—PTI*

Liverpool's Harvey Elliott scores a goal past Paris St Germain's Gianluigi Donnarumma in the Champions League Round of 16 first leg in Paris *PHOTO: X / @LFC*

Lyon coach Paulo Fonseca was banned for 9 months

PARIS, 6 MAR

Lyon coach Paulo Fonseca has been banned from the touchline at games for nine months for aggressively confronting the referee at a French league game.Fonseca also is banned from the locker room and access to players at games until 15 Sept., the French league said in a disciplinary ruling on Wednesday.

The ban applies just to domestic games and can let Fonseca work on Thursday in the UEFA-organized Europa League. Lyon plays a first-leg game of the round of 16 in Romania against FCSB.Fonseca angrily confronted referee Benoît Millot on Sunday about a potential penalty for Brest deep in stoppage time as Lyon led 2-1.After being shown a card, Fonseca approached the referee and leaned in very close to his face before being pushed away by Lyon captain Corentin. Fonseca tried to confront the referee a second time and was restrained by a couple of Lyon players.It was Fonseca's fifth game in charge of Lyon since being hired in January by the club's American owner, John Textor. *—PTI*